



NEWS

## Lindsay business owner stands by decision to not force customers to wear masks

'I can't turn people away because they can't wear a mask when I myself can't' says Kawartha Homebrew Supply owner Andrew Gouin

By [Catherine Whitnall](#) Kawartha Lakes This Week

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Andrew Gouin wants all his customers to enjoy their shopping experience.

That's why the Kawartha Homebrew Supply owner says he won't force his customers to wear a mask.

It's something Gouin has subscribed to since opening the Russell Street business in

September, having grown tired of having to drive outside the area to purchase items for his own home brewing hobby.

A sign posted on the business's door states, 'I have no right to force you to wear a medical device on your face. If at any time, while you are in my establishment, you feel under distress from your mask, you are under NO OBLIGATION to disregard your personal health and safety for my, or anyone else's sake.'

"The mask mandate has been such a divisive issue," said Gouin.

"There are people who have legitimate reasons for not wearing a mask. There are those who are having difficulty getting into stores and even have a fear of going out because they will be criticized by others. I'm not out to tell people to not wear a mask. I'm just trying to accommodate those who can't wear a mask."

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit communications officer Bill Eekhof said a public health inspector did visit the business but it was closed at the time. The business can remain open, even under the revised restrictions that came into effect Saturday (April 17), as it sells perishable products. Gouin was feeling unwell and voluntarily closed the shop for one week as a precaution. The health unit plans to follow-up and is working with Kawartha Lakes bylaw.

Richard Ovcharovich, HKPR environmental health manager said the province has strengthened their position on the requirement to wear a mask when indoors but noted the legislation does allow for some exemptions. These include having a medical condition that inhibits the ability to wear a mask or face covering, is unable to put on or remove their mask or face covering without the assistance of another person, for the purposes of health and safety, and in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Human Rights Code.

Some mask wearers experience headaches, difficulty breathing and increased anxiety. Gouin is familiar with some of these complaints due to his own health issue.

"I can't turn people away because they can't wear a mask when I myself can't. . . People need to take a sense of responsibility for their own actions," said Gouin who strictly enforces physical distancing, which he believes is more effective. "It almost seems that, since we started wearing masks, that people suddenly lost their fear. With the masks, they started getting closer to one another thinking they're safe."

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Gouin also empathizes with those who have hearing challenges and just the overall positive impact of being able to “see” someone talking.

“It is nice to see smiles at the same time. We’ve lost a lot of the friendliness because of the pandemic,” said Gouin, adding the support and compliance shown by many early on has turned into frustration and apathy for some. “People are tired of feeling disconnected.”

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