



Controlling COVID-19: Legislation, Enforcement and Education

Periodic lock-downs, community specific bylaws, health advisories, restrictions on gatherings are all valid actions that rely on voluntary behaviour. In light of rapid COVID-19 growth, potential health system overloads and substantial public harm, an additional approach to achieving behavioural shifts may have value – an approach demonstrated in the historic program to achieve seat belt usage.

Seat Belt Usage – Moving to High Compliance

In the 1970's seat belts were not consistently used across Canada. Substantial numbers of people saw seat belts as a constraint, uncomfortable, expensive, and something that was being pushed on the users, outside of their control.

Research of approaches across Canada and in other jurisdictions concluded that to attain high rates of seat belt usage, three elements needed to exist and be implemented as a coordinated whole – legislation, education and enforcement.

There needed to be **legislation** that required the use of the seat belt and imposed a significant penalty (fine) where this was breached.

There needed to be **education** of society as a whole on the reasons for seat belt usage, its benefits, the impacts of non-compliance on individuals, risks and on the legislation and its enforcement.

And, there needed to be **enforcement** of the legislation.

The **method of implementing** this approach was critical. A **coordinated approach** was needed. Legislation was put in place that had reasonable and effective measures to describe required compliance and meaningful sanctions. Education of the general public showed the need for required compliance. And concentrated, periodic enforcement highlighted required behaviours that were communicated to the public to complement education and to provide a high profile.

This approach was shown to achieve high rates of compliance in seat belt usage– perhaps through fearing enforcement, but also by being educated on the benefits of usage.

Controlling COVID-19 – Moving Behaviours to High Compliance

A **coordinated approach** to controlling the COVID-19 contagion that utilizes a balance of legislation, education and enforcement should assist in achieving high rates of behavioural compliance.

- Proclaim **legislation** at each level of government that includes clear behavioural and operational requirements for individuals, groups and businesses (e.g. wearing of masks, size and types of groups, hours of operation). Legislation must outline specific consequences of non-compliance (fines, loss of licensing, for example).
- **Educate** the public (individuals, industry, agencies – society) on the behaviours required for the control of COVID-19, the impacts of non-compliance particularly in terms of the harm that can be caused in various segments of the public.

- Visibly **enforce** the legislation in a concentrated region and time. For example, pick targeted areas in a community or region, enlist all enforcement personnel to monitor behaviours and to issue appropriate enforcement orders where violations occur.
- Enlist the media, schools, business, community organizations to **report on the enforcement** actions, in the context of the **results the legislation** is designed to achieve, **educating** the publics. For example, enforcing mask wearing provisions through the issuance of tickets with substantial fines shows the seriousness of the situation, and allows the communication to society of the harm to the public that can occur through failure to adhere to the legislated mask wearing requirements.

A coordinated legislation, education and enforcement approach has worked in other situations requiring broad behaviour changes in society. The risk of not taking this approach is to let some in society harm another portion of society through their failure to take appropriate voluntary actions.

A Hope for Increased Compliance and Control of COVID-19

Continuing with periodic lock-downs, community specific bylaws, general health advisories, and restrictions on gatherings are all valid actions but may not result in societal behaviour shifts in the time frame and to the degree that getting control of the COVID-19 virus demands.

A coordinated legislation, enforcement and education approach can achieve lasting behaviour changes and through the selective, coordinated actions need not cause excessive costs of enforcement.

A Thought For Future Consideration

Individuals want to control their own actions, to have minimal government interference. Yet, society requires individual behaviour to not harm others in society – hence, the introduction of laws and enforcement. If the call for action were not so urgent another approach that does not rely on laws and enforcement could be considered – looking to the spiritual aspect of behaviour.

If individuals can learn how their behaviours impact others, they may also learn how their behaviours can be changed.

Indigenous societies and religious orders have teachings that guide behaviour – an emphasis on these teachings across society may result in a broad behaviour change. For example, the concepts in the Medicine Wheel of indigenous society could provide a powerful base for communicating to the public on the reasons for particular behaviours and how they might be achieved.

However, for now, in light of rampant growth of infections of COVID-19, this approach may not be able to be implemented in sufficient time to achieve the required short term behaviour changes. An immediate change is needed, and a coordinated legislation, education and enforcement approach has demonstrated success in past circumstances.