

Why the PM needs to start wearing a mask



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Rich List editor

Jul 22, 2020 - 5.40pm

Billionaire shopping centre owner Shaun Bonétt wants Prime Minister Scott Morrison to start wearing a face mask and for their use to be mandatory in all public places nationwide to help battle the pandemic and remove confusion created by some retailers demanding their use while others do not.

If governments do not [make masks compulsory](#), he is urging the big retail chains including Woolworths, Coles and Aldi to require customers to wear masks while shopping in their stores.



Rich Lister Shaun Bonétt outside a Sydney Woolworths. He thinks we should all wear masks in public places, even the prime minister.

Mr Bonétt is [one of the nation's wealthiest 100 people, with an estimated fortune of \\$1 billion](#) in the 2019 Financial Review Rich List, built largely on a property portfolio that spans shopping centres in Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and New Zealand.

"I think it is incumbent upon our government, given the immense cost that this pandemic is costing all Australians, that a more cautious and preventative approach is taken," he said.

"If the government does not adopt this practice [requiring masks] then I think it is incumbent on Woolworths, Coles and Aldi, as the largest food suppliers to Australians, to do this."

The Sydneysider has taken to wearing an N95 mask in public despite no mandate being in place in NSW.

At present there is an ad-hoc system driven by international businesses and retailers such as Apple that requires customers to wear masks if they enter any of their stores around the globe.

Mr Bonétt said that without using masks as part of an arsenal in the fight against COVID-19, it would be harder to open up the domestic economy.

"I think clearly it makes sense for masks to be worn Australia-wide in order to have the opening up of borders between states," he said.

Look to Japan

Australia should look to emulate Japan, he said, where its citizens readily wore masks, the government had not forced a lockdown and the country had recorded one of the [lowest death rates in the world](#), despite its high-density living and having more elderly people on a per capita basis.

"The Japanese government requests people refrain from going out unless necessary, wear masks and practise social distancing without ever forcing them to go into lockdowns," Mr Bonétt said.

"The Japanese have a high degree of social responsibility and discipline which we should all aspire to emulate, particularly during these times."

Mr Bonétt wants everyone from the prime minister down to wear a mask in public settings.

"It's about leadership. We need to see the prime minister wearing a mask. We need to see senior ministers wearing masks."

Mr Bonétt is concerned about the pandemic's effect on the most vulnerable in the community, particularly the elderly and disabled who are being forced to shop for essential items and potentially being exposed to the deadly virus.

Despite foot traffic being a key driver of his tenants' revenue, and therefore critical to his rent income, Mr Bonétt wants to see better strategies in place to reduce exposure for vulnerable people.

"The handicapped and the elderly have, in my view, certainly not had the right level of focus on them. These groups are the most vulnerable," he said.

"I think a higher level of care needs to be provided to them.

"While I commend certain initiatives of Woolworths and Coles to assist the elderly, from a government point of view I really have not heard enough of how they are actually focusing on providing a higher level of care to this very vulnerable group.

"From what I have observed they've been exposed to conditions they shouldn't have been, considering they are in a high-risk category."