COVID-19: Use of Face Masks & Respirators

Wearing a mask, in addition to physical distancing, getting vaccinated and other public health measures, can reduce the spread of COVID-19. Even though masks may not be required, masking continues to be an important part of our community’s response to the pandemic. Wearing a well-fitting, high quality mask is an important measure we can still use to protect ourselves and one another.

We can still wear masks to protect ourselves & others against COVID-19

It is encouraged to wear a mask if you feel it is the right choice for you, based on your level of risk. Masks can be considered:

- especially if you are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19
- if you live, work or spend time with someone who is at higher risk of COVID-19, such as someone who has a weak immune system or is a senior
- if you are in a crowded indoor setting with poor ventilation
- to add an extra layer of protection in any setting

Places where masks are required

The provincial government also requires that masks be worn in indoor settings under the Reopening Ontario Act. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Public transit
- Hospitals
- Long-term care homes and retirement homes
- Clinics that provide healthcare services (e.g. attending doctor's appointments, vaccine clinics)
- Laboratories and specimen collection centres
- Shelters for persons experiencing homelessness
- Congregate care supportive housing residences where the residents share facilities for living, dining, sleeping or bathing and receive funding from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing, Ontario Health, a service manager designated under the Housing Services Act, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Support Services Corporation, or Mlziwe Biik Development Corporation

Masks are still required in all public settings if:

- You are returning from international travel. Wear a mask for 14-days, even if you are exempt from quarantine.
• You are a close contact of someone with COVID-19. Wear a mask for 10 days after your last exposure, even if you do not have to self-isolate. Avoid activities where mask removal would be necessary (e.g. dining out).

• You have symptoms of COVID-19 or test positive. Wear a mask for 10-days after the onset of symptoms or positive test result.

Wear a mask if required by your workplace for personal protective equipment.

Qualities of a Good Cloth Mask

• Masks should be made of at least three layers of tightly woven fabric (such as cotton or linen), or two layers with a filter layer for extra protection.

• Consider a medical mask or respirator for even better protection.

• You can add the filter layer into the pocket of a cloth mask. For masks without a pocket, cut/unstitch one end and tuck a filter in between the two layers.

• Your mask should fit your face, covering your nose, mouth and chin without gaping.

• Your mask should be comfortable, easy to breathe through, and not limit your vision.

• Your mask and ties/ear loops should fit securely to avoid adjusting during use.

• Choose a fabric that can support a high temperature wash (e.g. cotton). Avoid stretchy material.

• Choose a fabric that maintains the mask shape after washing and drying.

People at Greater Risk of COVID-19

A medical mask, respirator or properly fitted 3-layer cloth mask is recommended for anyone who:

• has tested positive for or has symptoms of COVID-19

• is caring for someone who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19

• lives in an overcrowded setting with someone who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19

• is at risk of more severe illness from COVID-19

• is at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 because of their living or work situation

Products Not Recommended

• A face shield is not an alternative to a mask as it does not protect others from your respiratory particles.

• A face shield may be worn with a mask as added protection for the wearer.
• Plastic masks do not protect others from your respiratory particles because they do not fit snug to the face.
• Masks with an exhaust valve can spread respiratory particles into the room. They do not protect others or limit the spread of COVID-19.
• Neck gaiters, scarves or bandanas are not well secured to the head or ears, making them more likely to move or slip out of place. They also do not cover the nose, mouth and chin securely without gaps.
• Persons wearing religious coverings should wear a face mask underneath.

**Proper Use of a Face Mask**

• Wash or sanitize your hands before putting on and after taking off your mask.
• Place the mask over your nose, mouth and chin without gaping.
• Change your mask if it becomes moist or dirty.
• Remove your mask by the ear loops without touching the front of the mask.
• Put your used mask in a plastic bag or directly in the laundry bin to be washed.
• Wash cloth masks after each use with other items using the hot wash cycle and dryer.

**What to Avoid When Using Masks**

• Do not share your mask with others.
• Do not re-use disposable masks.
• Avoid touching your face or mask when wearing it.
• Do not wear your mask under the nose or chin, on your forehead, or hang it from your ear.
• Do not put masks on children under the age of two.
• Do not put masks on people who have trouble breathing or who cannot remove the mask without assistance.

**Communicating with people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing:**

Some people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing may remove their mask, or may ask others to remove their mask, because they rely on facial movements and/or lip-reading to communicate. See tips for [communicating with people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/communicating-deaf-hard-hearing.html).

Visit the [Government of Canada](https://www.canada.ca) website for information about mask use.

**For more information**, visit us at [toronto.ca/COVID19](https://toronto.ca/COVID19) or call 416-338-7600.

**Get fully vaccinated** as soon as you can for the best protection against COVID-19. Learn more.

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**TORONTO Public Health**

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