Face Masks and Coverings for the General Public

The best protection from COVID-19 is to keep two metres (or six feet) from others, wash your hands often and avoid non-essential trips in the community. Wearing a cloth face mask or face covering has not been proven to protect the person wearing it, but it can be an added measure to protect others around you, even if you have no symptoms. It is important that you use and clean your mask properly. Using a mask incorrectly can accidentally spread infection to yourself.

Do not use N95 and surgical masks, as they are in limited supply and urgently needed for healthcare workers.

When and Where to Use a Cloth Mask or Face Covering

It is strongly recommended that you wear a face mask or covering when you are unable to maintain a two metre (six feet) distance from others, such as on transit, in an elevator, when shopping or entering and leaving your apartment building.

If you are sick, wear a mask if you need to go to a medical appointment. Do not use public transit.

Qualities of a Good Cloth Mask or Face Covering

A good cloth mask or face covering should:

- Allow for easy breathing.
- Fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops.
- Maintain their shape after washing and drying.
- Be changed as soon as possible if damp or dirty, and cleaned after each use.
- Be comfortable and not require frequent adjustment.
- Be made of at least two layers of tightly woven material fabric (such as cotton or linen).
- Be large enough to completely and comfortably cover the nose and mouth without gaping.

Masks or face coverings should not:

- Be shared with others.
- Impair vision or interfere with tasks.
- Be made of plastic or other non-breathable materials.
- Be secured with tape or other inappropriate materials.
- Be made of materials that may fall apart easily, such as tissues.

Making a Cloth Mask or Face Covering

- Use at least two layers of tightly woven fabric (e.g. cotton or linen).
- Use different fabrics for each side of the mask, so you know which side faces in or out.
- The mask should be large enough to cover the nose and mouth, without gaps.
- Use ties or ear loops for a secure fit, and for easy breathing.
- Do not use plastic or non-breathable materials.
- Be sure the mask or covering does not interfere with your vision or your tasks.
- For instructions on making a mask using fabric, a t-shirt or a bandana, visit the Government of Canada website.
Putting On a Mask or Face Covering

- Wash your hands before putting on a mask.
- Keep hair away from your face.
- Place the mask over your mouth and nose snugly. There should be no gap.
- Be sure it fits comfortably and that it’s easy to breathe, to avoid adjusting the mask while using it.
- Avoid touching your face and mask while using it.
- Do not share your mask with others.
- Do not leave your mask around your neck, hanging from your ear, or on your forehead.
- Do not put your used mask in your pocket because it is contaminated with germs. Put it in a plastic bag until you can wash it.

Taking Off a Face Mask

- Change your mask as soon as it gets damp or soiled.
- Remove the mask without touching the outside of the mask.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose and mouth when removing the mask.
- Put the mask directly in the laundry or a lined bin to be cleaned.
- Wash cloth masks after each use, in the laundry with other items using the hot cycle.
- Discard non-reusable masks in a lined garbage.
- Clean surfaces that a dirty mask touches.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after removing your mask.

People Who Should Not Use Face Masks

- Children under the age of two.
- Anyone who has trouble breathing.
- Anyone who cannot remove the mask without assistance.

Wearing a Mask at Work

Follow instructions provided by your employer regarding the option of choosing to wear a non-medical mask or face covering.

Do Not Use Medical-Grade Masks

It is extremely important that we keep the supply of medical masks for healthcare workers where they are urgently needed for medical procedures, and to care for individuals who have COVID-19. Healthcare workers need medical masks, including N95 and surgical masks.

More information

For more information, visit our website at www.toronto.ca/COVID19 or call us at 416-338-7600.