

## Use of Cloth Masks or Face Coverings

Wearing a mask or face covering is required in all indoor public spaces, and in apartment building and condominium common areas in Toronto under the [Mandatory Mask or Face Covering Bylaw](#).

Wearing non-medical (cloth) masks or face coverings can be an added public health measure for containing the spread of COVID-19 when it is used in combination with frequent handwashing, physical distancing and staying home when sick.

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness. The infection spreads from close contact with someone with COVID-19 through their respiratory droplets or touching our face with contaminated hands. Respiratory droplets can include coughing, sneezing, talking or even normal breathing. When a person is singing, laughing or talking loudly, the droplets can travel further than two metres/six feet.

People may unknowingly pass the infection to others because they do not have symptoms (asymptomatic) or have not yet developed symptoms (pre-symptomatic). The highest risk for infection is with prolonged close contact.

### My Mask Protects You and Your Mask Protects Me

As we are now in Stage 3 of reopening in Toronto, more people are returning to work, reconnecting, moving around the city and using public transit. This is making physical distancing more challenging. The risk of spreading COVID-19 is greater indoors as there is less air flow and ventilation, more crowding, and a greater chance of touching surfaces that have been contaminated by respiratory droplets.

Wearing masks or face coverings indoors helps us to prevent spreading our germs to others. There is evidence that cloth masks can reduce the spread of respiratory droplets into the air and landing on surfaces. Jurisdictions that have legislated mandatory masks have seen a decrease in new COVID-19 cases.

The use of masks/face coverings is non-invasive, inexpensive, and can help save lives. Masks may also serve as a visual reminder to everyone that we need to be vigilant and continue to maintain physical distance.

### Non-medical Masks or Face Coverings

Everyone should wear non-medical (cloth) masks or face coverings when going to public places, and in all indoor public settings. Non-medical masks or face coverings can be made with household items or purchased materials. It is important to use and clean a mask properly (see below). Using a mask incorrectly can accidentally spread infection to the wearer.

Do not use N95 and surgical masks as they are in limited supply, and are urgently needed for healthcare workers. Also be respectful of people who are not wearing a mask. Some health conditions make breathing through a mask difficult.

## Qualities of a Good Cloth Mask or Face Covering

A good cloth mask or face covering should:

- Be at least two layers of tightly woven cotton or linen.
- Cover over nose, mouth and chin, and be easy to breathe through.
- Fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops without gaping or impairing vision.
- Be comfortable to avoid the need for adjustments when wearing.
- Maintain their shape after washing and drying.
- Not contain non-breathable materials such as plastic.

For instructions on making a mask using fabric, a t-shirt or a bandana, visit the [Government of Canada website](#).

## Proper Use of a Mask or Face Covering

- Do not share your mask with others.
- Wash your hands before putting on and after taking off a mask.
- Place the mask over your nose, mouth and chin.
- Avoid touching your face and mask while using it.
- Change your mask as soon as it is moist or dirty.
- Do not leave your mask tucked under the chin, hanging from your ear, or on your forehead.
- Remove the mask by the ear loops without touching the front of the mask.
- Put used mask in a plastic bag or directly in the laundry bin to be washed.
- Launder cloth masks with other items using the hot cycle and dryer.

## People Who Should Not Use Face Masks

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

## Use of Face Shields as an Alternative to Masks

A face shield is not an alternative to a mask. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has stated that they “do not recommend [use of face shields as a substitute for cloth face coverings](#). It is not known if face shields protect others from the spray of respiratory particles. The CDC does not recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings.”

## **Use of Masks or Respirators with Exhalation Valves or Exhaust Valves**

Masks with an exhalation valve are not recommended because they may filter dust particles in the air as the person inhales, but they may not filter virus particles or respiratory droplets. This means droplets from a person can be spread in a room, reducing the benefit of the mask. Respirators with exhaust valves are also not recommended. These are intended to make the respirator more comfortable for the person who is wearing it, but they can also allow respiratory droplets to spread in room.

## **Use of Clear Plastic Masks**

Clear plastic face masks that extend below the chin and wrap around the sides of the face may be considered when communicating with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, to allow them to lip read. However, clear plastic face masks are not recommended for general use as they do not cover the nose, mouth and chin without gapping and cannot be properly cleaned and disinfected between uses.

## **More information**

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

Also, consider downloading Health Canada's [COVID Alert](#) app so you can be notified directly if you have been in close contact with someone who was contagious with COVID-19.