

## **Fact sheet: Wearing a mask in the community**

COVID-19 can be transmitted by infected persons who do not yet show symptoms, or who may never show symptoms. Recovery strategies for certain sectors and certain social activities must take into account how people with and without symptoms spread COVID-19. This challenge forces us to consider additional strategies to reduce transmission by all possible means.

We must continue to adopt the behaviours that we know prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- Staying home and away from others if you are ill.
- Washing your hands frequently.
- Covering your cough with tissues or your sleeve.
- Physical distancing.
- Cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces and objects.
- Protect those most at risk from the virus.

The use of physical barriers (e.g. Plexiglas), changes to workflow, and spacing aids such as taped visual cues are examples of important and effective means of preventing the spread of COVID-19 in public spaces and or work environments.

**The wearing of non-medical masks or cloth face coverings is additional personal practice that can help** to prevent the infectious respiratory droplets of an unknowingly-infected person from coming into contact with other people outside the home. Commercially-available and homemade cloth masks, as well as medical masks can play a role in reducing the transmission of COVID-19.

Non-medical masks or cloth face coverings can play an important role in situations and community settings where physical distancing is not possible or is unpredictable. The benefits of their use are greatest when the risk of viral transmission is higher (e.g. local community transmission, crowded public places where you may not be able to control your contact with others). Benefits of use are marginal where risk of exposure is low (e.g. limited community transmission, private places where you are able to control physical distance and limit contact with others).

When the local epidemiology and rate of community transmission warrant it, the **wearing of non-medical masks or cloth face coverings is recommended** in crowded public settings, for periods of time when it is not possible to consistently maintain a two-metre physical distance from others. These situations could include public transportation, stores and shopping areas. Face masks may also be recommended in some group living situations (e.g., group homes, correctional facilities, dormitories or group residences). Advice regarding the wearing of masks may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Some situations may call for the use of a medical mask, for example, medical masks may be a more appropriate choice for some service providers, depending on their environment and their clientele. All efforts should be made to preserve the supply of medical masks for those who most need them. Consideration should also be given to the supply of both medical and non-medical masks to the population so there is equitable access to prevention measures.

It is important that non-medical masks or cloth face coverings be worn safely.

The website [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus) has information on the appropriate use of non-medical masks or cloth face coverings, including how to make your own. There is ongoing discussion regarding the best materials or best construction methods for non-medical masks or cloth face coverings, and the website will be updated as new information becomes available.

Non-medical masks or cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

**For employers**

Non-medical masks or cloth face coverings are not considered personal protective equipment (PPE). Recommendations for the use of personal protective equipment are based on risk assessments of specific environments and risk of exposure. There may be some non-healthcare work settings for which medical masks may be more appropriate than non-medical masks. Masks may not be suitable for all types of occupation. Employers should consult with their Occupation Health and Safety team and local public health before introducing mask-wearing policies to the workplace.

When establishing policies regarding use of non-medical masks or cloth face covering in the workplace, employers should consider carefully the occupational requirements of their workers and their specific workplace configuration to ensure mitigation against any possible physical and psychological injuries that might inadvertently be caused by wearing a face covering (e.g., interfering with the ability to see or speak clearly, or becoming accidentally lodged in equipment the wearer is operating). The potential impact of the non-medical mask or cloth face covering on other employees or clients should also be considered (e.g. design/construction of the mask, material used, messaging, etc.).