

## COVID-19 Media Lines

### Use of non-medical masks (or facial coverings) by the public [document updated]

**Issue statement:** There is evidence that both pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic people could transmit the virus that causes COVID-19. As provinces and territories prepare to lift restrictive public health measures, the use of non-medical masks or face coverings may be recommended as an additional layer of protection to limit the spread of COVID-19 in certain community settings.

#### Key messages

- Canadian public health guidance related to COVID-19 has been changing as the evidence base and our understanding of COVID-19 rapidly evolve. We are continually looking at the evidence as it is being produced and working with our partners across the country and around the world to learn more.
- The following measures are the best way to prevent the transmission 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 your surfaces and objects
  - Protecting those most at risk from the virus
- It is critical that we continue to implement these measures, even as we move through the next stages of this pandemic and slowly resume our daily activities.
- If used correctly, a non-medical mask can play an important role in situations where physical distancing is impossible or unpredictable.
- Given that the science tells us it is possible to be spreading the virus before, during and even without any symptoms, wearing a non-medical mask—even if you have no symptoms—is another step you can take to protect others around you when physical distancing is not possible.
- Public health officials in your area will make recommendations based on several factors, including rates of infection or transmission in the community. Recommendations will vary from location to location.
- Wearing a non-medical mask or cloth face covering **is recommended** for periods of time, particularly in crowded settings where it is not possible to keep a two-metre distance from others:
  - Community settings where physical barriers and spacing aids are not in place; (e.g., some retail or work spaces);
  - Enclosed environments (e.g., public or commercial transportation); and/or



- High-risk settings where outbreaks can spread quickly (e.g. group living settings, correctional facilities).
- Wearing a non-medical mask in the community does not mean you can back off the public health measures that we know work to protect you.
- Please visit [Canada.ca/le-coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/le-coronavirus) for information on the appropriate use of non-medical masks or face coverings, including how to make your own. There is ongoing research regarding the best materials or best construction methods for non-medical masks, and the website will be updated as new evidence becomes available.

### ***How wearing non-medical masks can help protect others***

- Wearing a non-medical mask is another way to cover your mouth and nose to prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating others.
- A cloth mask or face covering can reduce the chance that others are coming into contact with your respiratory droplets, in the same way that our recommendation to cover your cough with tissues or your sleeve can reduce that chance.

### ***Considerations when wearing non-medical masks***

- Canadians need to understand exactly what wearing a mask will achieve, and that if they choose to wear non-medical masks they need to be used safely:
  - Avoid moving the mask around or adjusting it often.
  - Masks should not be shared with others.
  - If you choose to use a non-medical mask, it should be well-fitted (non-gaping).
- If wearing a non-medical mask makes you feel safer and stops you from touching your nose and mouth, that is good. Remember not to touch or rub your eyes as that is another route of infection.
- It is important to make sure your hands are clean when you put on and take off the non-medical mask, and to wash your hands or use a Health Canada-approved hand sanitizer if you touch your face.
- Non-medical masks should be replaced as soon as they become wet or soiled, washed in hot water and completely dry before being used again.
- You should also be aware that you can contaminate the mask by touching it. The outside of the mask may also become contaminated.
- Non-medical masks or face coverings should not be placed on children under the age of two years, anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious or is unable to remove the mask without assistance.



- Please remember that non-medical masks will not prevent COVID-19 spread without consistent and strict adherence to good hygiene and public health measures, including frequent hand washing and physical distancing. The website [canada.ca/coronavirus](https://canada.ca/coronavirus) is updated with information on the measures you should take, such as hand washing, when putting a mask on or taking it off. There is also information on how to wash cloth masks or safely dispose of other non-medical masks (such as dust masks).

## **Workplace / For Employers**

- There may be some situations where the use of medical masks may be appropriate. For example, medical masks may be an appropriate choice for some service providers, depending on their workplace and clientele.
- 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 company's Occupation Health and Safety team and local public health before introducing mask-wearing policies to the workplace.