



## COVID-19 Media Lines

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

**Issue statement:** Evidence indicates that pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic people could transmit the virus that causes COVID-19. As jurisdictions prepare to lift restrictive public health measures, non-medical masks or cloth facial 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 and our understanding of COVID-19 rapidly evolves. 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.
- To prevent transmission of COVID-19 the following measures are our best defence:
  - Staying home and away from others if you are sick
  - Washing your hands frequently
  - Covering your cough with tissues or your sleeve
  - Practicing physical distancing
  - Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects
  - Protecting those most at risk from the virus
- It is critical that these measures continue, even as we shift through next phases of this pandemic and slowly start resuming daily activities.
- If used correctly, a non-medical mask can play an important role in situations where physical distancing is not possible or is unpredictable.
- Given that the science tells us it's possible to spread the virus before, during and even without having any symptoms, wearing a non-medical mask—even if you have no symptoms—is an additional measure you can take to protect others around you, in situations where physical distancing is not possible.
- Public health officials in your area will make recommendations based on a number of factors, including the rates of infection and/or transmission in the community. Recommendations may vary from location to location based on local epidemiology.
- 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 physical 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 from public health measures that we know work to protect you.
- Please visit [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus) for information on the appropriate use of non-medical masks or face coverings, including how to make your own. Non-medical masks can be made at home from readily available materials, ensuring that they are accessible to all who need them. 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.

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

- Wearing a non-medical mask is another way of covering 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 ensure you put on and take off your non-medical mask with clean hands, and wash your hands or use a Health Canada approved hand sanitizer if you do touch your face.
- Non-medical masks should be changed as soon as they get damp or soiled, and should be washed in hot water and dried thoroughly before re-using.
- People should also be aware that masks can become contaminated on the outside or when touched by hands.
- Non-medical masks or facial 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.



- 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 handwashing 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).

### ***Work environments/for employers***

- 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.
- 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 occupations. Employers should consult with their Occupational Health and Safety team and local public health before introducing mask-wearing policies to the workplace.