

## Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

# Mask Use for Non-Healthcare Workers

Masks (either surgical masks or non-medical masks such as cloth masks, bandanas or other face coverings), can be worn to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to others (also known as source control). Source control masks could be considered if physical distancing is not possible. Employers can assess worker risk of exposure to COVID-19 when considering source control in the workplace.

## Masks used for source control – principles

- Masks worn for source control protect others from potential infectious droplets of the wearer.
- Non-medical masks, e.g. cloth masks, are preferred for source control due to current shortages in medical masks.
- Masking may lead to more hand-face contact. [Washing hands or cleaning with alcohol based hand rub is critical](#) – perform frequently and immediately after touching the mask.
- Some workers may not wish to wear a mask or have conditions (e.g. asthma, eczema) that make masking difficult or uncomfortable. Be flexible in a workplace policy on masks for source control.
- If personal protective equipment is required to perform a work task, that requirement takes priority over masking for source control.

## Assessing worker risk of exposure to COVID-19

- A risk assessment can help the employer determine whether source control could be helpful for workers. The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration [risk categorization](#) is adapted below.
- Risk among workers will vary by ability to physically distance and other controls available, e.g. physical barriers
- Non-healthcare workers generally fall into low (minimal contact with the public and coworkers) to medium (frequent/close contact with the public and coworkers) exposure risk. Here are some examples of work that vary from low to medium risk:
  - Staff working from home
  - Office workers able to physically distance
  - Delivery/courier, pick-up/drop-off service
  - Food service workers, office workers unable to physically distance, transit workers
  - Grocery store clerks, child care workers
- Where workers are not able to practice physical distancing or have frequent contact with the public, masking could be considered for source control.

## Applying the hierarchy of controls

A comprehensive strategy to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace would include as many controls as possible:

- **Engineering:** Remove/block the hazard at the source (e.g. physical distancing, physical barriers such as Plexiglass booths, [frequent environmental cleaning/disinfection](#)).
- **Administrative:** Optimizing the movement of workers to minimize potential contact with the hazard (e.g. scheduling – staggered shifts, breaks, and meals; work station spacing; work from home policies, limited hours, staff reduction, virtual meetings, paid sick leave, temperature screening, symptom screening/reporting).
  - **Personal Hygiene:** Worker actions or behaviors to reduce hazard exposure (e.g. clean hands, coughing or sneezing into the sleeve, masking for source control).
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** e.g. masks, gloves, eye protection, gowns or coveralls.

Masking for source control could be considered a personal hygiene measure, and it protects **others**, not the masked worker. If implementing masking for source control, note the following:

- Masks are to be changed if visibly soiled, damp, damaged or difficult to breathe through.
- For non-medical masks, no specific type or material is clearly better than another.
- Breathability, comfort, and safety (e.g. adequate vision, communication) are key to compliance.
- The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) and the US [Centers for Disease Control](#) have provided guidance on how to make, use, and care for cloth masks and could be used as a guide.
- Refer to [When and How to Wear a Mask](#) and the [Ministry of Health](#) for more information.

## When using masks for source control, always remember

- **Masking for source control protects others around you by catching your own droplets.** Ensure the mask covers both the nose and mouth.
- Where physical distancing is not possible, worker risk of COVID-19 exposure can help determine if a source control masking policy could be useful.
- When wearing masks, it is critical to avoid touching the face, and to wash hands or use alcohol based hand rub often.
- Masking for source control needs to be part of a broad strategy to reduce transmission risk.
- Medical masks are to be conserved for use in healthcare workers.