

# GUIDANCE FOR MASKS FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

## Overview

Good public health practices can minimize transmission of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, influenza and common colds. These practices include: proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting and staying home when sick.

Masks, including non-medical masks, are another way to reduce the risk of spreading respiratory infections such as COVID-19, especially in indoor settings. This document has been developed to support individuals in reducing the risk of transmission of respiratory infections by wearing masks correctly and appropriately.

Businesses and entities may also promote COVID-19 and influenza vaccination to staff, volunteers and attendees and other eligible persons as part of their public health strategy.

## COVID-19 Risk Mitigation

<b>Why use a mask</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A well-constructed, well-fitting and properly-worn mask can help protect you and others from COVID-19.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ A mask can prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating people, surfaces and/or objects.</li><li>○ Wearing a mask can help to reduce your risk of becoming infected with COVID-19.</li></ul></li><li>• If you use a mask incorrectly, you could accidentally increase the risk of spreading COVID-19 despite your good intentions; therefore, it is <b>critical</b> you use and dispose of or clean your mask properly.</li><li>• Masks are tools that <b>complement but do not replace</b> other measures that have proven to be effective in slowing the spread of respiratory infections between people.</li><li>• Wearing a mask should be used <b>in combination</b> with other measures such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Getting vaccinated against COVID-19, and getting all doses you are eligible for;</li><li>○ Following recommendations for isolating if you test positive for COVID-19 or experience COVID-19 symptoms not related to a pre-existing condition;</li><li>○ Planning events outdoors instead of indoors when possible;</li><li>○ Improving ventilation in indoor spaces;</li><li>○ Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer with a minimum 60% alcohol;</li></ul></li></ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow (i.e., good respiratory etiquette); and</li> <li>○ Avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When to use a mask</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● While masking is not required by the province, it may be required by policy in higher risk settings such as Alberta Health Services, and contracted health care facilities and continuing care sites as well as other health care settings.</li> <li>● Albertans should assess their personal or family risk profile to determine if they wish to take precautions such as wearing masks in certain settings or choosing masks that offer better protection (e.g., a medical mask, a KN95 mask or a respirator).<sup>1</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Wearing a mask may be a reasonable precaution, particularly when in a shared space with people from outside your immediate household, when in an indoor setting and/or in any crowded setting.</li> <li>○ Albertans in high-risk health settings such as health care facilities and continuing care facilities should wear a medical mask instead of a non-medical mask.</li> <li>○ Vaccinated Albertans who have completed 5 days of isolation should wear a medical mask when around others outside of home for another 5 days.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Federal and municipal authorities, businesses or other entities may establish requirements for mandatory masking in other settings (e.g., airplanes, trains, municipal buildings); Albertans should be aware of and follow these mask requirements.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When not to use a mask</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Do not use a mask that:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is wet, dirty, ripped/torn or damaged in any way.</li> <li>○ Has been used by another person.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Individuals should not wear masks if:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ They are a child under 2 years of age;</li> <li>○ They have trouble breathing;</li> <li>○ They are unable to put a mask on or take it off without assistance.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>How to ensure your mask has a good fit</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How a mask fits impacts its effectiveness. A well-fitting mask should:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Comfortably cover the nose, mouth and chin without gaps;</li> <li>○ Fit securely to the head;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> A respirator, such as an N95 mask, forms a tight seal against the skin of the wearer and provides a higher level of filtration. It is used to reduce the risk of inhaling hazardous airborne particles and aerosols, including dust particles and infectious agents. All filtering facepiece respirators are labelled to provide respiratory protection to the wearer.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Be comfortable and not require adjustments.</li><li>● Strategies to improve mask fit include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Adjusting ties or ear loops;</li><li>○ Adjusting the flexible nosepiece;</li><li>○ Tying knots in the ear loops and tucking the sides of the mask to ensure the edges lay flat;</li><li>○ Using a mask fitter or brace, which is a device made of flexible material that helps to provide a snug fit;</li><li>○ Layering a well-fitting cloth mask over top of a disposable mask to improve fit (ensure you are still able to breathe easily);</li><li>○ Keeping facial hair and beards shaved or short.</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>How to wear a mask</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Check the mask for damage; if damaged, discard the mask.</li><li>● Before putting on the mask, wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (minimum of 60% alcohol).</li><li>● Ensure your hair is away from your face.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ A mask can be safely worn by someone with facial hair.</li></ul></li><li>● Open mask fully to cover over your nose to below the chin.</li><li>● Place over nose and mouth and secure to your head with ties or ears with ear loops (depending on the style of mask).</li><li>● If the mask has a nose bar, pinch around your nose to reduce gaps between your face and the mask.</li><li>● Adjust if needed to make sure your nose and mouth are fully covered and to reduce gaps between your face and the mask.</li><li>● Avoid touching the mask while wearing it;<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ If you need to adjust your mask, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer (minimum of 60% alcohol) or wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after you touch it.</li></ul></li><li>● Keep your nose, mouth and chin covered at all times, until you are ready to remove the mask.</li></ul>
<b>How to remove a mask</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol) before you remove the mask.</li><li>● Do not touch the front of the mask. Remove using the ties or ear loops.</li><li>● Dispose of your disposable mask in a lined garbage bin and wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol).</li></ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you have a reusable mask, store it in a clean paper or cloth bag until it can be washed.</li><li>• Remove your mask if it becomes wet, torn, dirty, or damaged.</li></ul>
<b>What not to do with your mask</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not touch your face under the mask.</li><li>• Do not wear the same mask for a long period of time; it should be changed if the mask becomes damp.</li><li>• Do not share masks with another person.</li><li>• Do not wear the mask below your nose or chin.</li><li>• Do not hang the mask from your ears or place it under your chin. Store it in a clean paper or cloth bag until you put it on again.</li><li>• Do not secure the mask with tape.</li><li>• Do not let the mask give you a false sense of security; masks should be used as an addition to other measures such as staying home if you are ill, avoiding close physical proximity with people who are not from your household, and performing hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.</li><li>• Do not discard your mask in public by littering (e.g., discarding it on the sidewalk or on the floor of a public washroom). Use garbage cans or bring the used mask home with you.</li></ul>
<b>How to take care of your mask</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Always store, use, wash, re-use and/or discard your mask in accordance with the directions of the manufacturer, if they are available.</li><li>• Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol) before putting it on and taking it off.</li><li>• Store your unused, clean re-usable masks in a way that protects them from getting dirty or damaged (e.g., in a clean, sealed storage bag).</li><li>• Do not reuse masks that are wet or soiled prior to laundering. A wet or soiled mask that requires laundering should be placed into a sealed bag (consider using a bag that can be washed) or container where it is stored until it can be taken home and washed.</li><li>• Identify or label mask storage bags so masks are not accidentally used by others.</li></ul>
<b>Cloth Masks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Buying a cloth mask:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ The Government of Alberta does not endorse any particular vendor of cloth masks.</li><li>○ There are currently no required standards for non-medical and/or cloth masks sold in Canada.</li></ul></li></ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Masks should have multiple (at least 3) different layers of breathable fabric, fit securely against your face, allow for clear breathing and be washable.</li><li>• Do <b>not</b> buy or use cloth masks or respirators with exhalation valves. Exhalation valves or vents allow infectious respiratory particles to spread outside the mask and do not protect others from COVID-19.</li><li>• Washing:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Place the cloth mask directly into the washing machine or a bag that can be emptied into the washing machine. If the bag storing the used mask cannot be laundered or hand washed, it should be discarded into a garbage bin that is lined with a plastic bag.</li><li>○ Wash with other items using a hot cycle, and then dry thoroughly.</li><li>○ Inspect the mask prior to reuse to ensure it has maintained its shape after washing and drying.</li><li>○ Perform hand hygiene immediately after handling a used mask.</li><li>○ Reusable masks with an integrated filter layer can be washed multiple times.</li><li>○ Remove disposable filters before washing and change as directed by the manufacturer.</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Medical Mask and Respirator Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In general, medical masks and respirators can provide better protection than non-medical masks.</li><li>• Medical masks and respirators sold in Canada are required to meet established standards for filtration, breathability and fluid resistance.</li><li>• Medical masks are recommended for:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Vaccinated individuals who have completed their isolation period and are still encouraged to wear a mask;</li><li>○ Individuals in high-risk health settings;</li><li>○ Individuals caring for or living in a crowded setting with someone who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19;</li><li>○ Individuals who may be at risk of more severe disease or severe outcomes from COVID-19; and</li><li>○ Individuals who are at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 because of their living situation, such as those living in crowded settings.</li></ul></li><li>• Do not use masks or respirators with exhalation valves. These masks do not protect others from COVID-19 or limit the spread of virus.</li><li>• Respirators are designed to fit snugly to the face, which may provide a better fit. Although a respirator worn in the community does not need to have been formally fit tested as is required in some occupational</li></ul>

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	<p>settings, fit testing provides maximum effectiveness. These masks should be seal-checked each time they are donned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Medical masks and respirators are generally single use and disposable. However, some may be reused until visibly dirty, damp or damaged. Check product-specific information to determine how masks are to be used.</li></ul>
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This document and the guidance within it is subject to change and will be updated as needed.

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