

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 COVID-19 in especially in indoor settings. This document has been developed to support individuals in reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 by wearing masks correctly and appropriately.

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

All Albertans are required to follow all applicable Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) orders.

COVID-19 Risk Mitigation

<p>Why use a mask</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully vaccinated persons must continue to wear a mask in indoor settings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Although vaccines provide substantial protection against severe illness, no vaccine is 100% effective and protection may decrease over time. • A well-constructed, well-fitting and properly worn mask can help protect you and others from COVID-19. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A mask can prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating people, surfaces and/or objects. ○ Wearing a mask can help to reduce your risk of becoming infected with COVID-19. ○ If you become infected with COVID-19, having worn a mask at the time of exposure may reduce the risk of developing serious illness. • If you use a mask incorrectly, you could accidentally spread infection, despite your good intentions; therefore, it is critical you use and dispose of or clean your mask properly. • Masks are tools that complement – not replace other measures that have proven to be effective in slowing the spread of COVID-19 between people. • Wearing a mask should be used in combination with other measures such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ staying home when you're sick;
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All Albertans must isolate if they have COVID-19 symptoms: fever, cough, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, runny nose or sore throat (CMOH Order 39-2021); ○ maintaining spacing from other individuals or households, where possible; ○ washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol; ○ covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow (i.e., good respiratory etiquette); and ○ avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands.
<p>When to use a mask</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Albertans must follow provincial requirements for wearing masks. • Albertans should assess their personal or family risk profile to determine if additional precautions would support their situation, which may include wearing masks in outdoor settings (e.g., if spacing from other people is difficult) or wearing a mask with better protection (e.g., a medical mask or respirator¹). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wearing a mask is recommended particularly when in a shared space with people from outside your immediate household, when in an indoor setting and/or in any crowded setting. ○ Albertans in high-risk health settings or who have tested positive or are showing symptoms of COVID-19 should consider using a medical mask instead of a non-medical mask. • Federal and municipal authorities may establish requirements for mandatory masking in other settings (e.g., airplanes, trains, municipal buildings); Albertans should be aware of and follow these mask mandates.
<p>When not to use a mask</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When it is wet, dirty, ripped/torn or damaged in any way. • If it has been used by another person. • Individuals should not wear masks if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ they are a child under 2 years of age; ○ they have trouble breathing; ○ they are unable to take one on or off without assistance.

¹ 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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How to ensure your mask has a good fit

- How a mask fits impacts its effectiveness. A well-fitting mask should:
 - Comfortably cover the nose, mouth and chin without gaps
 - Fit securely to the head
 - Be comfortable and not require adjustments
- Strategies to improve mask fit include:
 - Adjusting ties or ear loops
 - Adjusting the flexible nosepiece
 - Tying knots in the ear loops and tucking the sides of the mask to ensure the edges lay flat
 - Using a mask fitter or brace, which is a device made of flexible material that helps to provide a snug fit
 - Layering a well-fitting cloth mask over top of a disposable mask to improve fit (ensure you are still able to breathe easily)
 - Keeping facial hair and beards shaved or short

How to wear a mask with ear loops or ties

- Before putting on the mask, wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol.
- Ensure your hair is away from your face.
 - A mask can be safely worn by someone with facial hair.
- Check the mask for damage; if damaged, discard.
- Open mask fully to cover from over your nose to below the chin.
- Place over nose and mouth and secure to your head with ties or ears with ear loops (depending on the style of mask).
- If the mask has a nose bar, pinch around your nose to reduce gaps between your face and the mask.
- Adjust if needed to make sure your nose and mouth are fully covered and to reduce gaps between your face and the mask.
- Avoid touching the mask while wearing it;
 - if you need to adjust your mask, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol or wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after you touch it.
- Keep your nose, mouth and chin covered at all times, until you are ready to remove the mask.

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<p>How to remove a mask with ear loops or ties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove your mask if it becomes wet, torn, dirty or the ear loops/ties become damaged. • Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol before you remove the mask. • Do not touch the front of the mask. Remove using the ties or ear loops. • Dispose of your disposable mask in a lined garbage bin and wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol. • If you have a reusable mask, store it in a clean paper or cloth bag until it can be washed.
<p>What not to do with your mask</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not touch your face under the mask. • Do not wear the same mask for a long period of time; it must be changed when it gets damp. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ During cold temperatures, consider having a separate mask to put on indoors. • Do not share masks with another person. • Do not wear the mask below your nose or chin. • 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. • Do not secure the mask with tape or other inappropriate materials. • Do not let the mask give you a false sense of security; masks are meant to be used as an addition to other measures such as staying home if you are ill, physical distancing wherever possible, performing hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. • Do not discard your mask in public by discarding it on the sidewalk or on the floor of a public washroom for example – use garbage cans or bring the used mask home with you.
<p>How to take care of your mask</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always store, use, wash, re-use and/or discard your mask in accordance with the directions of the manufacturer, if they are available. • Hands should be cleaned before and after putting it on and taking it off. • Store your unused, clean re-usable masks in a way that protects them from getting dirty or damaged (for example in a clean, sealed storage bag). • After removing a reusable mask that will be re-worn prior to washing, it should be placed into a clean, breathable bag or container (allows for evaporation) for storage.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Identify or label mask storage bags so masks are not accidentally used by others.
<p>What to consider before making or buying a cloth mask</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of fabric or cloth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use multiple layers of tight woven fabric, including at least 2 layers of breathable tightly woven fabric, such as cotton, and an additional effective middle filter layer, such as non-woven polypropylene, for a total of at least three layers. ○ If possible, use different fabrics or colours for each side of the mask. This helps you to know which side faces your mouth and which side faces out. ○ Choose a fabric or cloth that can withstand frequent cycles through washing and drying machines. ○ You can include a filter in your mask by adding a filter fabric as a middle layer or by inserting a disposable filter into a pocket on the inside of the mask. • Laundering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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. ○ Launder with other items using a hot cycle, and then dry thoroughly. ○ Inspect the mask prior to reuse to ensure it has maintained its shape after washing and drying. ○ Perform hand hygiene immediately after handling a used mask. ○ Reusable masks with an integrated filter layer can be washed multiple times. ○ Disposable filters should be removed from the mask before washing and changed as directed by the manufacturer. • Making your own mask <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There are many different ways to make a cloth mask. Health Canada provides instructions with sew and no-sew options and includes types of materials you can use. Visit Health Canada for more information. • Buying a cloth mask <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Government of Alberta does not endorse any particular vendor of cloth masks.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ There are currently no required standards for non-medical and/or cloth masks sold in Canada.● Keep in mind that you should verify that the mask should have multiple different layers of fabric, fits securely against your face, allows for clear breathing and have the ability to be laundered.● Do not 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.
Medical Mask and Respirator Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● In general, medical masks and respirators can provide better protection than non-medical masks.● Medical masks and respirators sold in Canada are required to meet established standards for filtration, breathability and fluid resistance.● Medical masks are recommended for:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Individuals in high-risk health settings○ Individuals who have tested positive or are showing symptoms of COVID-19○ Individuals caring for or living in a crowded setting with someone who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19○ Individuals who may be at risk of more severe disease or severe outcomes from COVID-19○ Individuals who are at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 because of their living situation, such as those living in crowded settings.● Do not use masks or respirators with exhalation valves. These masks do not protect others from COVID-19 or limit the spread of virus.● 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 settings, it should be noted that fit testing provides maximum effectiveness.● 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.

This document and the guidance within it is subject to change and will be updated as needed.

Last Revised: November 2021.