

Renfrew County and District Health Unit

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions: Masks & Face Coverings

What you need to know about wearing a mask

The use of cloth masks can help control the spread of COVID-19. The Province of Ontario requires mask use when physical distancing is not possible. When it comes to indoor public spaces, it can be difficult to know if physical distancing is possible until entering.

Why are masks important?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that spreads through respiratory droplets, transmitted by close contact with someone with COVID-19 and by touching your face with contaminated hands. Respiratory droplets are produced through coughing, sneezing, talking or even normal breathing. When a person is singing, laughing or talking loudly, the droplets can travel farther than 2 metres (6 feet).

As a result, people may unknowingly pass the infection to others because they do not have symptoms (asymptomatic) or have not yet developed symptoms (pre-symptomatic). The highest risk for infection is with prolonged close contact.

Accumulating epidemiological evidence indicates that the widespread use of masks and/or face coverings by all persons decreases the spread of respiratory droplets. Expert opinion supports the widespread use of face coverings to decrease transmission of COVID-19. Masks or face coverings are recommended because they:

- keep our respiratory droplets to ourselves and help to prevent the spread of the virus to others;
- provide a non-invasive, inexpensive way to reduce the spread of COVID-19; and
- act as a visual reminder to others to remain vigilant and stay physically distant from others.

NOTE: Non-medical masks or face coverings do not replace physical distancing.

For more info: [Use of Non-Medical Masks Factsheet](#)

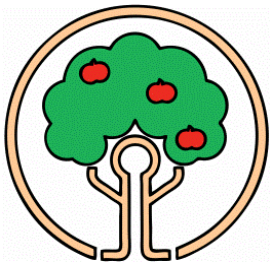
When must you wear a non-medical mask?

Residents must wear non-medical (cloth) masks or face coverings when entering enclosed public places. These cloth masks can be made with household items or purchased materials, and it is important to ensure they are used and cleaned properly. Be respectful of people who are not wearing a mask, as some health conditions make breathing difficult while wearing a mask.

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Residents should also wear a mask:

- **If you are sick:** If you are coughing or sneezing, wear a non-medical mask to protect people around you from getting sick. This is very important if you go to an appointment, clinic, or a hospital. If you are sick, you should not be going out in public for any other reason than to seek medical care. When seeking medical care, follow mask instructions given to you by a health care provider.
- **If you are caring for someone who is sick:** If you are taking care of someone who is coughing or sneezing, wear a non-medical mask when you are within 2 metres (6 feet) of them. The person you are taking care of should also wear a non-medical mask to protect you from their illness.
- **If you are going to an outdoor public place:** If you are outside of your home and in a setting where physical distancing is difficult to maintain, like when visiting an outdoor gathering where a 2 metre distance between others cannot be maintained.

For more info:

- [RCDHU Do's and Don'ts of Using Non-Medical Masks](#)
- [RCDHU Non-medical Mask Use when Shopping \(Community Use\)](#)
- [VIDEO : Why, when and where should I wear a cloth mask?](#)

What should I know about non-medical masks?

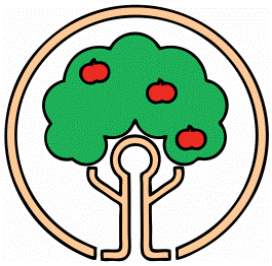
Note: You should always practice physical distancing and hand hygiene when wearing a non-medical mask.

- Non-medical masks only work when used properly and when combined with frequent hand hygiene with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Wearing a non-medical mask may increase your risk of infection if you are frequently touching your face or mask to readjust it.
- Replace the non-medical mask as soon as it is damp, crumpled or dirty.
- Do not share a non-medical mask with another person.
- Wash your non-medical mask with other items using a hot cycle with regular laundry detergent and dry thoroughly.
- If using a cloth mask, there should be at least two layers of tightly woven fabric, like cotton.
- All face coverings that cannot be cleaned should be thrown out.
- Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has

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trouble breathing, or anyone who is unable to remove the mask without assistance.

How do I put on a non-medical mask?

- Before touching the non-medical mask, wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Move hair away from your face.
- Put the non-medical mask over your mouth and nose and secure it to your head or ears with the ties or elastics. Ensure the mask fits snugly and that there are no gaps on the top of your nose, or around your cheeks and chin.
- Clean your hands again after you put on your mask.
- Do not touch the non-medical mask once you have it on. If you need to touch the non-medical mask, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after you touch the mask.

For more info: Public Health Ontario – [Steps to Put on a Mask](#)

How do I remove a non-medical mask?

- Clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer before removing your mask.
- Remove the mask by grasping the ties or ear loops and removing from your ears. Do not touch the front of the mask while removing it.
- Once removed, place your mask temporarily in a plastic bag until you return home, or dispose of it in a lined garbage bin. Do not place the mask in your pocket or purse. If you will be reusing your mask, place it directly into the washing machine when you return home.
- Do not leave your mask in a shopping cart or on the ground.

For more info: Public Health Ontario – [Steps to Take Off a Respirator/Mask](#)

What to know when choosing a mask or face covering?

What type of mask should I wear?

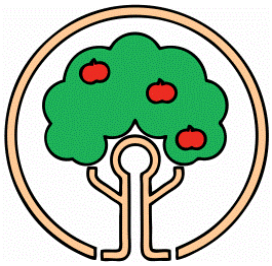
There are many types of masks available, including:

- non-medical cloth masks (can be washed and reused);
- disposable masks (can only be worn once); and
- medical masks (such as N95 respirators that should be reserved for front-line health care workers).

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When choosing a mask, make sure the mask:

- If cloth:
 - is made from at least two layers of tightly woven cotton or linen;
 - has no seams over the mouth and nose through which air may leak;
- covers the nose, mouth and chin while still being easy to breathe through;
- fits to the head with ties or ear loops without gaping or impairing vision;
- is comfortable enough to avoid the urge to readjust while wearing the cloth mask or face covering;
- maintains its shape after washing and drying; and
- is not made from non-breathable materials such as plastic.

Tips for proper use of a non-medical mask or face covering

- Wash or sanitize your hands before putting on, and after taking off the mask or face covering.
- Place the mask or face covering over your nose, mouth and chin.
- Avoid touching your face and mask or face covering while using it.
- Do not share your mask or face covering with others.
- Change your mask or face covering if it becomes moist or dirty.
- Do not leave the mask or face covering under your chin, hanging from your ear or anywhere else on your head.
- Remove the mask by the ear loops without touching the front of the mask or face covering.
- Place the mask or face covering in a plastic/paper bag or directly in the laundry bin to be washed.
- Wash the mask or face covering with other clothing items and use the hot cycle and dryer settings.
- [RCDHU Do's and Don'ts of Using Non-Medical Masks](#)
- [RCDHU Non-medical Mask Use when Shopping \(Community Use\)](#)
- [National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health Laundry Poster](#)

How do I wash, re-use, and discard a cloth mask?

Wearing a cloth mask can increase your risk of infection if you touch your face more frequently to adjust it or if you do not wash your hands before putting it on and taking it off. All parts of a cloth mask can become contaminated by breathing or touching it with unclean hands.

Cloth masks become contaminated, especially when touched by your hands. When taking off a cloth mask, follow these steps:

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- After washing your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, remove your mask by pulling the ties or ear loops away from your ears.
- If your mask has a removable, non-reusable filter, make sure to remove and throw out the filter before machine or hand washing your mask.
- For machine washing, put the mask directly into the washing machine or in a bag that can be emptied into the washing machine. Throw out the bag after you have used it to store your mask. If the bag is washable you can wash it with your mask. Wash your hands again with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after handling your mask.
- Wash the masks with other laundry using a hot water cycle.
- For hand washing, use laundry detergent and water as hot as you can stand, then dry thoroughly.
- When discarding damaged or worn-out masks, drop them in a lined garbage bin.
- Do not leave any discarded masks in places where others can come in contact with them, such as shopping carts, public seats, bus stops or on the ground.
- Cloth masks can be re-used throughout the day if not soiled and undamaged. With clean hands, remove the mask from your face and fold it in half so that the outer surface is inwards (so that the contaminated outer surface is not contacting anything during storage) and place it in a clean, sealable bag until ready to use again the same day.
- Disposable masks should not be washed, reused or recycled.

Can a face shield be used as a substitute or a replacement for a mask?

A face shield is **not** a substitute for wearing a face mask as it does not filter respiratory droplets. A face shield may provide additional protection for the wearer against droplets expelled from another person; however, these droplets may still be inhaled around the shield. Respiratory droplets expelled by the **wearer** may escape around the sides of the face shield, therefore providing less protection to others. If you choose to wear a face shield, we recommend - if possible - to wear it in addition to a properly fitted cloth mask.

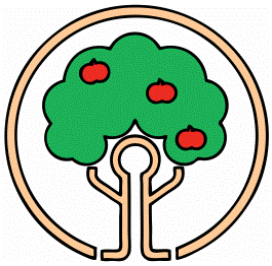
Is a face shield a good alternative for someone who can't wear a mask?

A face shield would **not** be considered an equal substitute for a face mask as it does not provide filtering capacity. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) supports the use of face shields as a "better than nothing" alternative to face masks if there is a shortage of non-medical masks or for populations who are not able to properly wear non-medical masks, such as individuals with a respiratory condition that prevents them from wearing a mask. The WHO makes note that face

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shields are inferior to face masks at preventing the spread of an infection through droplets, and at a minimum should extend below the chin and cover the sides of the face.

Who should not wear a non-medical mask or face covering?

- Children under the age of two years' old
- Anyone who has breathing difficulties
- Anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise cannot remove the mask or face covering without assistance
- [Ontario Face Coverings and Face Masks Page](#)

How can I make a non-medical mask?

For details on how to make your own non-medical mask(s), visit:

- Health Canada's website for [instructions on how to make a non-medical mask](#)
- Public Health Agency of Canada's [How to make a non-medical mask at home](#)
- CHEO's [Kids and masks: tips from an expert](#)

Are masks mandatory in Ontario?

While the province of Ontario has not made masks mandatory, some municipalities now have provisions in place for mandatory masks. If you're travelling within the province, please be sure to always bring a mask or face covering with you.

Additional Resources

- [Government of Ontario](#): Face coverings and face masks-About
- [Public Health Ontario Document](#): Non-medical masks and face coverings
- [Health Canada](#): Non-medical masks and face coverings-About
- [Masks4Canada](#): Grassroots group of members from diverse ages and backgrounds, to promote and educate the use of effective, re-usable, non-medical face coverings where physical distancing is not possible. Great source of evidence and other helpful information.