Questions and Answers Regarding the Mandatory Mask and Face Covering Directive

How do masks work?

Wearing a mask helps to trap COVID-19 and protects people who are around you. Since some people who are infected with COVID-19 may have the virus and not know it, whenever people are going out and might come into close contact with other people they should wear a mask. When other people wear a mask they are helping to protect you as well.

Wearing a mask should not replace other protective measures including physical distancing, hand washing, not touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands and self-monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms.

What is considered a mask?

“Mask” means: a cloth mask, medical mask, or disposable mask for filtering respiratory droplets that securely covers the nose, mouth, and chin and is in contact with the surrounding face without gapping.

What is considered a face covering?

A face covering is a piece of cloth, bandana or scarf that covers your nose, mouth and chin. Face coverings may provide some protection against the covid-19 virus, however it is recommended to wear a mask whenever possible and only wear a face covering if a mask is not available.

What type of mask should I wear?

There are many types of masks available including non-medical cloth masks that can be washed and reused, disposable masks that can only be worn once and medical masks such as N95 respirators that should be reserved for front-line health care workers.

Masks

When buying or making a mask you should look for masks that are made with:

- Two or three layers of tightly woven but breathable cloth such as cotton, flannel or quilting cotton
- No seams over the mouth and nose through which air may leak
- Horizontal pleats to help fit a variety of faces
Disposable non-medical face masks

Disposable non-medical face masks may also be worn. These masks are single use masks and should be put in the garbage after use.

Medical Masks

Like many countries, Canada continues to face a shortage of masks and other personal protective equipment for health care workers. To preserve supplies for healthcare workers medical masks and N95 respirators should be reserved for specific high-risk settings and are not recommended for lower-risk day-to-day activities like when you are in a grocery store or while taking public transportation. N95 respirators with valves, which let air out more easily when you breathe out, should never be used when the intent is to protect others from the virus you may be shedding because they will not trap the virus.

Current Evidence on Community Mask Wearing

Community Mask Use

Evidence shows that mask use supported by social norms and government policies is associated with less mortality from COVID-19.

- Wearing any mask helps to reduce the spread of COVID-19
- Benefits are increased when masks are worn properly (securely cover the nose, mouth and chin without gapping)
- Mask use should be combined with other protective measures, such as physical distancing, hand washing, not touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands, and staying home if you are sick

Plastic face shields

Evidence shows that plastic face shields alone are NOT equivalent to wearing a mask.

Please see sources below:

- Ontario Ministry of Health: [Face coverings and face masks](https://www.ontario.ca/page/face-coverings-and-face-masks)
- World Health Organization (WHO): [Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1)

FAQs About the Mandatory Mask Directive

Businesses

New Mandatory Masks Directive - Letter of Instructions for operators

Timiskaming Health Unit is mandating the use of masks in many indoor public spaces.
Please read the letter of instruction from Dr. Glenn Corneil to business owners and operators - July 15, 2020.

- Timiskaming Health Unit – Poster: Mask or face covering required (pdf)
- Sample policy for businesses, employers, and operators (pdf)

Can businesses or operators require proof of exemption, or turn people away?

No person should be:

- Required to provide proof of exemption or
- Turned away from indoor public spaces if unable to wear a mask

The directive provides for exemption listed and recognizes that no one should be forced to wear a mask if they are not able to wear one. We encourage our community to be COVID Kind. Let us all be thoughtful, respectful and considerate of one another and understand that not everyone can wear a mask safely.

When does this directive go into effect?

The directive goes into effect as of 12:01 am, July 24, 2020.

What is an enclosed public space?

“Enclosed Public Space” means indoor public spaces of businesses and organizations, accessed by the public.

Under this directive, enclosed public spaces include but are not limited to:

- restaurants, cafés, cafeterias, banquet halls;
- retail establishments and shopping malls;
- churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, or other places of worship;
- libraries, museums, art galleries, recreational facilities, bingo halls, community centers and halls, cinemas, theatres, concert venues, special event venues, convention centers, or other similar entertainment, cultural, or leisure facilities;
- sports facilities, sports clubs, gyms, yoga studios, dance studios, and stadiums;
- common areas of hotels, motels, or short-term rental premises such as lobbies, elevators, meeting rooms, rest rooms, laundry rooms, gyms, and kitchens;
- private transportation including taxis and rideshare services;
- common areas of premises under the control of a regulated health professional under the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, S.O. 1991, c. 18, as amended, such as waiting rooms;
- common areas of hospitals and independent health facilities such as lobbies, food courts and retail establishments;
- spas, hair salons, barbers, nail salons, and other personal service settings that are subject to health and safety protocols provided by the Province of Ontario during the provincial emergency
The following are not considered an enclosed public space:

- Spaces subject to provincial and/or local public health guidance:
  - Schools under the Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2, as amended;
  - Child care centers and providers governed by the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, S.O. 2014, c. 11, as amended;
  - Day camps.

**Are both business staff and customers subject to fines?**

Implementation of the policy will be enacted and enforced in ‘good faith’ and will be primarily used as a means to educate people on mask use in public spaces.

The directive outlines the requirements in the instruction letter to businesses and operators.

The policy requires that employees and agents wear a mask when working in the public areas of the enclosed public space unless the employee or agent is within or behind a physical barrier or is in an area of the premises that is not designated for public access.

**How is this being enforced?**

Every Operator of an Enclosed Public Space will have a policy to ensure that no member of the public is permitted to enter or remain in the public areas of the enclosed public space unless they are wearing a mask in a manner that securely covers their nose, mouth and chin.

Employees and operators will provide a verbal reminder to any customer entering the premises without a mask that the customer should be wearing a mask as a result of this directive.

Implementation of the policy will be enacted and enforced in ‘good faith’ and will be primarily used as a means to educate people on mask use in public spaces.

**Exemptions**

**Who is exempt from wearing a mask?**

Masks should not be placed on:

- Children under two years of age, or children under the age of five years either chronologically or developmentally who refuse to wear a mask and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver
- Individuals with medical conditions rendering them unable to safely wear a mask, including breathing difficulties or cognitive difficulties
- Anyone who is unable to remove the mask without help
- Anyone who is unconscious or incapacitated
- Employee or agent is within or behind a physical barrier (e.g. Plexiglas) or is in an area of the premises that is not designated for public access.
There may be situations where someone who is deaf or hard of hearing that may require an employee to remove their mask to speak to the customer. We remind anyone removing their mask to follow safe handling procedures and to keep a distance of 2 metres (6 feet) away from others.

PLEASE NOTE - No person should be:

- Required to provide proof of exemption or
- Turned away from indoor public spaces if unable to wear a mask

Are religious officiants exempt from wearing a mask when leading a ceremony?

We are aware that there are increased concerns about the possible airborne spread of COVID-19, but with masks now being mandatory, we currently recommend the following:

The officiant (e.g. minister, rabbi) of a religious ceremony can choose to not wear a mask if standing in an area of the religious space that is separate from the public attending the ceremony. The officiant should use a microphone to project their voice to reduce the risk of respiratory droplets being spread; and not participate in any singing or chanting. The officiant should stand at least 5 metres from the people attending and if there is more than one officiant, they should be spaced at least 2 metres apart from each other and not be facing each other.

Face shields

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, which therefore provides 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 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.
General inquiries

Why make masks mandatory now?

As more businesses and public spaces open and people increase their contacts, the risk of a rapid rise in infections and outbreaks is ever-present. Beginning this preventative measure now will also help to reduce the risk of a second wave of COVID-19 in the fall.

Increasing scientific evidence supports wearing a mask when in enclosed public spaces as an important measure in reducing COVID-19 transmission, while the risk of rising rates of infection continues.

What happens if I do not wear a mask?

Every Operator of an Enclosed Public Space will have a policy to ensure that no member of the public is permitted to enter or remain in the public areas of the enclosed public space unless they are wearing a mask in a manner that covers their nose, mouth and chin.

People in an Enclosed Public Space who remove their mask for extended periods of time, will receive a verbal reminder of the requirement to wear a mask under these instructions.

Do I still need to stay 2-metres away from others if I am wearing a mask?

Yes. The person responsible for a business that is open to the public, or an organization responsible for a facility that is open to the public, shall ensure that the place of business or facility is operated to enable members of the public in the place of business or facility to, to the fullest extent possible, maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from other persons. Wearing a mask is not an alternative to physical distancing. Every effort should be made to keep a 2-metre distance even when wearing a mask.

Can I remove my mask if physical distancing is not a concern in the establishment or enclosed public space I am visiting?

Members of the public are permitted the temporary removal of a mask where necessary for the purpose of:

- receiving services (including eating or drinking when dine-in services are allowed) or
- while actively engaging in an athletic or fitness activity including water-based activities.

Ensure you wash your hands using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after removing your mask.

Does the directive mean that masks have to be worn in my apartment building or condominium?

Masks are required when you are in enclosed public spaces. The mandatory mask directive does not include residential buildings or condominiums as they are not considered public spaces accessible by
the general public. Residential building owners or condo boards may choose to implement their own policies within their buildings.

**Do masks protect against COVID-19?**

Wearing a mask helps to trap COVID-19 if you are sick and protects people who are around you. Since some people who are infected with COVID-19 may have the virus and not know it, whenever people are going out and might come into close contact with other people they should wear a mask. When other people wear a mask they are helping to protect you as well.

Mask wearing cannot guarantee protection from the virus and should not replace proven measures such as frequent handwashing, avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands, practicing physical distancing and staying at home if you are sick.

To protect yourself and others from COVID-19, everyone should:

- Stay home as much as possible
- Avoid groups of people and crowded spaces
- Maintain physical distance (at least two metres or six feet) whenever possible
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing with tissues or your sleeve and wash your hands immediately after

**How do I properly wear a mask?**

- Immediately wash your hands before putting the mask on, before adjusting it, before taking it off and after taking it off. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash your hands.
- Make sure your mask allows for easy breathing and completely and comfortably covers the bridge of the nose, covers your mouth, fits snugly under your chin and against the sides of your face.
- Make sure your mask is secured to your head with ties or ear loops without the need to adjust frequently.
- If your mask has pleats, ensure that the pleats on the outside are facing down.
- If your mask has a metal strip over the nose, gently mould it over the bridge of your nose to ensure a close fit.
- Replace the mask as soon as it becomes damp, dirty, damaged or if it has shrunk after washing and drying.
- Do not share your mask with others, even within your own household.

Masks are not all made the same and may fit differently. Find a mask that fits your face and learn how to wear your mask.

Poster: [Safely putting on & taking off a non-medical mask](https://timiskaminghu.com/90484/COVID-19#Masks) (i.e., cloth mask)

**Watch: How to Properly Wear a Mask Video**
How can I donate a mask or get more information on how to acquire a mask?

Call the Timiskaming Health Unit’s Connections line at 1-866-747-4305, Ext. 2278 or email connect@timiskaminghu.com

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

Wearing a 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 masks can become contaminated by breathing or when touched by your hands.

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

- 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 it again the same day.
- Disposable masks should not be washed, reused or recycled.

More FAQs about masks

Who should wear a mask?

If you are sick:

- You should stay at home. If you need to go to a medical appointment, clinic or a hospital you should wear a mask. Avoid going to other public places when you are sick, even if you are wearing a mask. Once at your medical appointment, an appropriate medical/surgical mask may be provided to you. Follow the instructions given to you by a medical professional for wearing medical masks. At home, you should wear a mask when you must leave your room to go to a space that is shared with other people in your home.
If you are well and going to a public place such as a grocery store or pharmacy or using public transit:

- It is mandatory to wear a mask to protect individuals who are around you

If you are caring for someone who is sick and has or may have COVID-19:

- Wear a mask and maintain physical distancing (staying at least two metres or six feet apart) whenever possible if the person you are caring for has a fever, is coughing or is sneezing. If able to, the person you are taking care of should also wear a mask to prevent spreading the virus to others.

**What should I avoid about masks?**

Masks **should not:**

- Contain plastic, paper tissues or other non-breathable materials
- Be shared with others, including those in your household
- Impair vision or interfere with tasks

Things to consider when choosing to wear a mask:

- They may not block **all** the virus droplets that are spread through coughing or sneezing.
- They should fit snugly but comfortably over the nose and against the side of your face, be secured with ties or ear loops and allow for easy breathing.
- They should be made of cloth that tolerates frequent washing and drying. Cloth masks should be discarded if the material is frayed or has holes.

**What type of fabric or cloth do I use?**

Several organizations have proposed guidelines for mask design including what type of fabric or style to use. This is an area of active research and new evidence will likely emerge in the coming months. At this time, the Timiskaming Health Unit recommends the following materials and design for masks:

- Use two or three layers of tightly woven fabric that is breathable. Cotton is the most widely used fabric. It is better if the thread count is higher. For example, it is recommended that a 120 thread count or higher be used. A combination of fabrics can be used such as a pillowcases, cotton sheets and high thread count cotton with silk, chiffon, quilter’s cotton or flannel. The more comfortable fabric should be on the inside, against the face.
- Some organizations suggest using a third non-absorbent layer of fabric. A third layer of fabric may make the mask slightly better at keeping droplets (which may contain COVID-19) in but also could make a mask less breathable and harder to wear for longer periods of time.
- Choose fabrics that can withstand multiple washing cycles using hot water.
- If possible, use different fabrics or colours for the inside and outside of the mask. This will indicate which side to place over your face.
- Masks with pleats fit more face shapes and sizes.
- Masks made with a seam down the middle can leak air and may not block droplets as well as other styles of masks.
- A round elastic may fit more comfortably behind the ear than a wide, flat elastic.
What kind of mask can I wear with a hijab, niqab or burqa?

Wearing a head covering does not replace a cloth mask. Head coverings are not designed to filter air in terms of materials and they do not have a number of layers. The mask may have to be worn underneath the head covering to ensure the best fit against the face. Make sure the cloth mask fully covers your nose and mouth and fits snugly under your chin, over the bridge of your nose and against the sides of your face.

How do I use a mask while wearing glasses/sunglasses?

You may need to take off your glasses before putting on your mask to ensure the mask is placed properly over your nose. Avoid touching your glasses when wearing your mask. If you need to readjust your glasses, ensure you wash your hands using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately before and after touching them.

It is recommended that you take off your glasses prior to safely taking off your mask. Only take off your glasses and mask when you can wash your hands using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Your glasses can be washed with soap and water to decrease potential spread of COVID-19.

When should I take off my mask?

Ensure you wash your hands using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after removing your mask or anytime you wish to adjust your mask. You should take off your mask when:

- You are safely able to (when physical distancing can be maintained) and the mask can be placed in a lined garbage bin if it is not reusable, in a plastic bag for a short time while transporting it home or directly into the washing machine.
- It becomes damp or dirty and you can exchange it for a new one if you are still in a situation where you need to wear a mask.

Can I wear my cloth mask all day?

A mask can be worn all day as long as it does not become damaged, damp or dirty. Do not share your mask with others. Remove your mask with clean hands when you are safely able to do so and wash your hands using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Do not place your used mask into your pocket. It is important to note that:

Cloth masks:

- 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 it again the same day.
- Should be placed directly into the washing machine. You can place a cloth mask in a plastic bag for a short time to transport it home to launder.
Disposable masks:

- Should be removed and replaced if soiled, damaged or hard to breathe through.
- Are for one time use only and need to be thrown into the garbage after use.

Masks and the heat

- Wearing a mask is important to decrease the transmission of COVID-19 in any indoor setting where it may be difficult to maintain at least a two-metre or six feet distance.
- Wearing a mask outdoors is necessary in situations when proper physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Although wearing masks may become more uncomfortable in hot temperatures, they will still work. You may need to change your mask more frequently in hot and humid temperatures as it may become damp more quickly.
- Plan outdoor activities for the coolest times of the day and take breaks in the shade or cool environment if you find wearing a face mask uncomfortable in the heat.

Outdoor workers: For people undertaking physical exertion in heat, a mask can make the effort more difficult. Decreasing intensity and volume of work, taking more frequent rests and taking more cooling breaks may be necessary. Discuss with your employer.

Masks and Children

Wearing a cloth mask is recommended when physical distancing may not be possible. This does pose the question of how we can help kids over 2 years wear a mask.

Encourage your child to wear a mask by the following:

- **Explain why**
  - Kids watch, listen and learn. Explaining the importance of mask wearing in simple terms can help them understand why wearing a mask is important. Allow them to ask questions and express their feelings. You may want to start by reading a bit on how to help children cope with stressful public events to give you some guidance.

- **Give choices**
  - Consider letting your little one(s) choose their mask pattern and/or colour. Kids like to feel independent and being given choices. If you are able, include your child in selecting a cloth mask of their choice.

- **Include masks in imaginative play**
  - Young children are amazingly imaginative. Include a few cloth masks in their playtime and see what they come up with. Having masks present in their environment will let them become more comfortable to the look and feel of masks.

- **Set an example**
  - When heading out in public, show your kids how you put on your mask and explain why you are doing it – to protect those around you. Be a role model of the behaviours you are hoping to imprint on your youngest. Kids absorb information so quickly and mirror behaviours they see, especially of their caretakers.
Should I wear a mask when I exercise?

Wearing a mask when exercising may not be possible because of higher heart and breathing rates. Exercising without a mask is safer outdoors if there are people around who are not from your own household. If you are exercising outdoors, briefly passing someone on the sidewalk or road is not considered a significant risk for exposure to COVID-19. When exercising outdoors (such as jogging, cycling or skateboarding) here are some ways to stay safe:

- Maintain at least a two-metre (six feet) distance from others
- When in single file, spacing needs to increase with speed of movement
- Step-aside or pass others quickly and courteously on sidewalks
- If you are with others, travel in single file to allow others to pass safely
- If possible, consider using shared paths and sidewalks when it’s less busy

How do I make a cloth mask?

There are different ways to make cloth masks.

Use these resources to make your own cloth mask:

- Non-medical masks and face coverings: Sew and no-sew instructions
- How to Make Cloth Face Coverings
- Kids and Masks: Tips from an Expert

Where can I get a cloth mask in Timiskaming district?

If you need assistance on how to acquire a mask call the Timiskaming Health Unit’s Connections line at 1-866-747-4305, Ext. 2278 or email connect@timiskaminghu.com

Are masks mandatory in Ontario?

While the province of Ontario has not made masks mandatory, some areas now have provisions in place for mandatory masks or face coverings and additional locations are considering implementing this as well. If you’re travelling within the province, please be sure to:

- bring a cloth mask or face covering with you
- check the area you are travelling to for mandatory masks orders or by-laws

Some municipalities with orders and by-laws for mandatory masks include:

- Toronto
- Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Public Health
- Middlesex-London Health Unit
- Guelph, Wellington County and Dufferin County
- Windsor-Essex County Health Unit
- Public Health Sudbury & Districts
- North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit
- Algoma Public Health
Resources

- Timiskaming Health Unit – Poster: Mask or face covering required
- Timiskaming Health Unit - Poster: Putting on and taking off your mask
- Timiskaming Health Unit - Poster: My mask protects you and your mask protects me.
- Health Canada - About non-medical masks and face coverings
- Public Health Agency of Canada - General information about non-medical masks
- Public Health Agency of Canada - How to make a non-medical mask at home
- Government of Ontario - Face coverings now recommended when physical distancing is a challenge