



[Canada.ca](#) > [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#) > [Prevention and risks](#)

# Non-medical masks: About

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[About](#)

[How to put on, remove and clean](#)

[Sew and no-sew instructions](#)

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**Want to join the effort to limit the spread of COVID-19?**

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## On this page

- [Wear a mask to prevent COVID-19 spread](#)
- [Materials, construction and fit](#)
- [Proper use](#)
- [People at higher risk of exposure or more severe disease or outcomes](#)
- [Children and masks](#)

- People who are hard of hearing and clear masks
- Face shields
- Neck gaiters (neck warmers)
- Scarves and bandanas
- Masks with exhalation valves
- Masks in the workplace
- Safety considerations
- Stigma and those who can't wear masks
- Environmental considerations

## Wear a mask to prevent COVID-19 spread

As increased rates of community transmission of COVID-19 continue in many areas across Canada, and as new variants of the COVID-19 virus are identified, it remains important that you wear a non-medical mask when:

- you're in a shared space (indoors or outdoors) with people from outside of your immediate household
- advised by your local public health authority.

Shared spaces can include:

- parks
- homes
- backyards
- workplaces
- retail settings
- outdoor markets
- street get-togethers
- recreational settings, such as skating rinks

- public transportation, such as airplanes, trains, buses or shared vehicles

Check with your local public health authority on the requirements for your location.

Wearing a mask alone won't prevent the spread of COVID-19. You must also consistently follow personal preventive practices.

## Materials, construction and fit

Well-constructed, well-fitting and properly worn non-medical masks can help protect you and others from COVID-19.

How well a non-medical mask works depends on the materials used, how the mask is made and how well it fits.

A non-medical mask can be homemade or purchased and should:

- be made of multiple layers, including
  - at least 2 layers of tightly woven fabric, such as cotton **and**
  - a third middle layer of filter-type fabric, such as non-woven polypropylene
- use materials that are breathable

Does your mask fit properly? (printable poster)

### Filters

Using a filter as a middle layer in your non-medical mask adds an extra layer of protection against COVID-19 by trapping smaller infectious respiratory particles.

You can include a filter in your non-medical mask by:

- adding one as a middle layer, using a non-woven polypropylene fabric

- readily available polypropylene fabrics include:
  - craft fabric
  - interfacing material frequently used in sewing
  - the non-woven material used to make some reusable shopping bags
- inserting a disposable filter into a pocket on the inside of the mask
  - filters can be purchased or you can prepare your own using a:
    - piece of non-woven polypropylene fabric
    - paper kitchen towel that has been folded in half
    - baby wipe that has been rinsed, dried and folded in half

Reusable masks with a non-woven filter layer can be washed multiple times.

Disposable filters should be:

- changed daily or as directed by the manufacturer
- removed from the mask before washing

## 2-layer masks

Wearing a well-constructed and well-fitting 2-layer non-medical mask properly will still protect you and others around you.

- If your 2-layer mask has a pocket intended for a filter, insert a filter.
- If your 2-layer mask doesn't have a filter, consider sewing in a pocket for a removable or disposable filter.

## Fit is important

A well-fitting mask should:

- be large enough to completely and comfortably cover the nose, mouth and chin without gaps

- fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops
- be comfortable and not require frequent adjustments
- maintain its shape after washing and drying

## Proper use

A non-medical mask is most effective when it's worn properly. Uncovering your nose or mouth while wearing a mask:

- exposes you and others to potentially infectious respiratory particles
- won't prevent the spread of COVID-19

Wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when you:

- adjust your mask
- put your mask on
- take your mask off

It's important to keep your mask clean when not in use, or when eating or drinking.

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.

Change your mask as soon as possible if it gets damp or dirty. Place soiled masks in a secure, waterproof bag or container until you can wash them in the laundry.

Discard disposable masks and filters properly in a garbage container.

## People at higher risk of exposure or more severe disease or outcomes

Some people are at higher risk of:

- more severe disease or outcomes if they get COVID-19
- exposure to COVID-19 because of their work or living situation

If you're at higher risk, you should:

- wear a well-fitting, well-constructed non-medical mask that includes a filter layer **or**
- consider wearing a medical mask if one is available to you

It's important that you wear your mask properly.

## If you're sick or caring for someone who is sick

If you've been diagnosed with, or have symptoms of COVID-19, you should wear a medical mask if available when you:

- have to leave your isolation location (for example, to seek medical attention)
- are in a shared space or may come into contact with others

If you're providing care to someone who has been diagnosed with, or has symptoms of COVID-19, wear a medical mask.

If a medical mask is recommended but unavailable, wear a non-medical mask that's well fitting, well constructed and that includes a filter layer.

## Children and masks

Children under the age of 2 should **not** wear masks.

Between the ages of 2 and 5, children may be able to wear a mask if supervised. This will depend on their ability to tolerate it as well as put it on and take it off.

Children older than 5 should wear one in situations or settings where they're recommended. A child's ability to properly use and care for their mask is impacted by factors such as:

- age
- maturity
- physical or cognitive ability

## People who are hard of hearing and clear masks

If you're hard of hearing or interact with people who use lip-reading to communicate, consider wearing a clear mask.

If a clear mask isn't available:

- maintain at least a 2-metre distance if you must rely on lip-reading to communicate
  - only the person speaking should remove their mask while communicating
- use written communication, closed captioning or decrease background noise as much as possible
  - if writing, don't share pens or paper

Clear masks can also be used in settings where facial expression is an important part of communication.

## Face shields

Face shields do **not** replace masks, but can be worn in addition to a mask.

A face shield is used to protect the eyes of the person wearing it. Using a face shield without a mask won't protect you or others from infectious respiratory particles that can escape around the face shield.

If you're unable to wear a mask, you may want to wear a face shield. Choose one that extends around the sides of the face and below the chin. You'll still need to:

- maintain physical distancing of at least 2 metres
- practise good hand hygiene, especially if you touch the face shield

## Neck gaiters (neck warmers)

Neck gaiters (also known as neck warmers) aren't recommended because they:

- aren't well secured to the head or ears, and are likely to move or slip out of place
- are difficult to remove without contaminating yourself

If a mask isn't available and you must use a neck gaiter:

- it should be folded to provide at least 2 layers of fabric and should include a filter or filter fabric added between layers
- lift it away from your face, especially when taking it off
- wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer anytime you need to adjust it, especially when putting it on and taking it off

## Scarves and bandanas

Scarves or bandanas aren't recommended because they:

- aren't well secured to the head or ears, and are likely to move or slip out of place

- don't cover the nose, mouth and chin securely without gaps

If a mask isn't available, and you must use a scarf or bandana:

- it should be folded to provide at least 2 layers of fabric and should include a filter or filter fabric added between layers
- it should completely cover the nose and mouth, and fit snugly under the chin
- wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer anytime you need to adjust it, especially when putting it on and taking it off

## Masks with exhalation valves

Masks with exhalation valves or vents are **not** recommended. This is because they allow infectious respiratory particles to spread outside the mask. These masks do **not** protect others from COVID-19 or limit the spread of the virus.

## Masks in the workplace

When implementing mask (medical or non-medical) wearing policies in the workplace, employers should consult:

- occupational health and safety resources **or**
- their local public health authority.

There may be some non-health care work settings where medical masks may be more appropriate than non-medical masks.

## Safety considerations

When wearing a non-medical mask, make sure that it:

- is made of breathable materials
- can be removed quickly and safely if necessary
- keeps your vision clear and doesn't interfere with tasks

**Do not:**

- share your mask with others
- place a mask on anyone:
  - under the age of 2
  - who has trouble breathing
  - who's unable to remove it without assistance
- secure a mask with tape or other inappropriate materials
- make a mask out of materials that easily fall apart, like tissues

## Stigma and those who can't wear masks

Some people may not be able to wear a mask. Be kind rather than making assumptions about those you see without them. For those unable to wear a mask, singling them out in public can be socially isolating and lead to anxiety.

Masks aren't recommended for:

- people who live with illnesses or disabilities that make it difficult to put on or take off a mask without assistance
- those who have difficulty breathing
- children under the age of 2

## Environmental considerations

Most disposable and single-use masks are mostly made of plastic. Growing quantities of disposable and single-use masks are being discarded in the regular garbage as there's little to no opportunity for recycling. This increases the amount of:

- unrecycled waste going to landfills
- plastic pollution in the environment or in water sources

By choosing reusable masks, you can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 while also reducing your environmental impact.

If you must use a disposable mask, always make sure that you dispose of it properly in a garbage container.

## Related links

- [Travel restrictions in Canada: Entry, borders and transit](#)
- [Medical masks and N95 respirators](#)
- [Use of non-medical masks in community settings](#)
- [How to wear a non-medical mask properly \(video\)](#)
- [COVID-19: How to safely use a non-medical mask \(printable poster\)](#)
- [Regulatory considerations on the classification of non-medical masks](#)

### **Date modified:**

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