

## **COVID-19 Guidance on Cloth Masks (Non-Medical Masks)**

Wearing a cloth mask is an additional measure you can take to protect others around you where it is more difficult to keep a 2 metre distance, like when getting essentials at the grocery store or pharmacy. Physical distancing is still the most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Frequent hand washing and not touching your face are also high on the list of actions to keep doing to prevent the virus from spreading. This guidance provides key information to frequently asked questions about COVID-19 and cloth masks, also called non-medical masks or face coverings. If you choose to wear a cloth mask, here is what you need to know.

### **How is COVID-19 spread?**

COVID-19 spreads through close contact with an infected person:

- When the infected person coughs or sneezes, or even talks, they produce respiratory droplets. Coughs and sneezes produce many more droplets than just talking.
- The majority of the droplets travel less than 2 metres (6 feet) then fall to the ground, contaminating surfaces in that area.
- You can pick up the virus if you come in contact with an infected person's droplets, for example by being close to them (less than 2 metres) or by close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands.
- You can also pick up the virus from touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) that were contaminated with the respiratory droplets of someone with the infection; touching transfers the virus to your hands. You can then infect yourself if you touch your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands.

### **Can COVID-19 be spread by someone who doesn't have symptoms?**

The extent to which a person can spread the disease before they develop symptoms (pre-symptomatic) or an infected person who never develops symptoms (asymptomatic) can spread COVID-19 is unknown at this time. However, we do know that it is occurring among people in close contact or in close physical settings. The virus can be found in the nose and throat of people before they develop symptoms so these people can spread the virus without knowing they carry the virus. The vast majority of transmission of COVID-19 occurs, however, when individuals have symptoms because they have a greater amount of the virus in their body and usually have a cough, resulting in increased spread of droplets.

### **How can I prevent the spread of COVID-19?**

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol if soap and water are not available. Washing your hands removes the virus so that you won't contaminate yourself or spread the virus to others.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. The virus enters your body through the eyes, nose or mouth.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then immediately throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands. You can also cough or sneeze into your elbow/sleeve, which stops spread of droplets into the environment and reduces contamination of your hands.
- Clean high-touch surfaces regularly so that you don't pick up the virus if someone else transferred the virus to those surfaces.

- Keep a distance of 2 meters (6 feet) between yourself and others (physical distancing) so that you do not come in contact with their droplets and they do not come in contact with your droplets.
- In situations where physical distancing may be difficult (like the grocery store), wear a cloth face mask to protect others from your droplets in case you have the virus and do not know it.

If you suspect you have COVID-19 symptoms, stay at home, complete the COVID-19 self-assessment tool ([www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19](http://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19)) or call 811.

### **How do cloth masks (non-medical masks) help prevent the spread of COVID-19?**

Wearing a homemade cloth mask or non-medical mask has not been proven to protect you, the person wearing it, as these masks are not able to filter out many of the droplets produced by someone else who coughs. Medical grade masks are the only ones certified to prevent the spread of viruses and protect the wearer from the droplets of others.

However, wearing a cloth mask is an additional measure you can take to protect others around you. A cloth mask protects others because the mask can trap droplets from you so that they don't land on other people or surfaces. This can reduce the chance that others are coming into contact with your respiratory droplets, in the same way that covering your cough with tissues or your sleeve can reduce that chance.

### **When could I wear a cloth mask (non-medical mask)?**

If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 and need to go out for essentials to a place where physical distancing is difficult (e.g. grocery shopping or using public transportation) you can wear a cloth mask to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets. You don't need to wear it for example when you go for a walk by yourself. Wearing a non-medical mask is another way of covering your mouth and nose to prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating others or landing on surfaces. It helps protect others from you.

### **Do I still need to wash my hands and practice physical distancing?**

Absolutely. Wearing a non-medical mask when in public or other settings is not a replacement for following proven measures such as handwashing and physical distancing. In addition, remember not to touch your face whether you wear a mask or not.

### **How should I put on and wear the cloth mask (non-medical mask)?**

- Before you put on your cloth mask, make sure you wash your hands either with soap and water for 20 seconds, or you can use some hand sanitizer.
- With clean hands, pick up your mask by the ear loops or strings. Touch the face-covering part of the mask as little as possible.
- Position the mask and place the loops around your ears or tie the strings. Adjust the mask to make sure it is snug around your nose and chin and covers as much of your face as possible. Make sure it's comfortable so you won't need to adjust the mask when wearing it.
- You should not touch your face/mask while wearing it because your hands might have become contaminated from touching items or surfaces.
- Keep your mask on while you are talking to others and don't take one ear loop off to talk on the phone.

**How can I stop my glasses from fogging up when I wear my mask?**

Your glasses can become foggy when you wear a mask. There are a few tips to help prevent this from happening:

1. Perch your glasses a little further down your nose than usual so there is more space between the glasses and your face. Your breath will move up through the space with minimal fogging.
2. Clean your glasses with soap and water before you put on your mask. The soapy water creates a thin film that temporarily prevents the glasses from fogging up.

**Should my child wear a mask?**

Masks should not be worn by children under 2 years of age. Teaching your older child to wear a mask is a good idea. Keep it fun. Mask or no mask, it is recommended that children stay at home and don't go with you to the grocery store or to run essential errands during the pandemic unless it is unavoidable.

**When and how should I take off my cloth mask (non-medical mask)?**

Take the mask off when:

- You can maintain social distancing (like when you return home or get in your car after shopping);
- You can wash or sanitize your hands; and
- You have a safe place to dispose of your mask for washing.

Always consider the outside of the mask contaminated. Wash your hands before and after you take it off.

With clean hands, remove the loops from behind your ears, or untie the ties, and toss the mask directly into the washing machine or a bag. If you put it in a bag, put your mask directly into the washing machine when you arrive home. Clean or dispose of the bag and wash your hands again.

**How do I keep these masks clean and virus free?**

Cloth masks need to be washed after each use. Wash in hot water and soap either in a washing machine or by hand. Dry in the dryer or hang to dry. Remember, when you take off your mask, put it directly in the washing machine or in a bag for washing later.

**How do I make a non-medical mask (face covering)?**

Visit the Public Health Agency of Canada website for instructions on making a cloth mask, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/instructions-sew-no-sew-cloth-face-covering.html>

Things to consider include:

- Make sure it covers your nose and mouth; most masks fit under the chin.
- It should fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face.
- It should be easily secured with ties or ear loops; masks with ties may be more easily adjusted than masks with ear loops.

- It should have multiple (2-4) layers of fabric, with tightly woven fabrics such as high thread-count pillow cases and thick cotton being frequently recommended. If you hold the material up to the light and can see a lot of light through it, it probably isn't a good choice. While having more layers will catch more droplets, it also reduces breathability.
- Some people opt to add an additional filter material, like vacuum bags or coffee filters, inside their mask as an extra protective layer. Don't use any material (e.g. household air filters) that might have high amounts of fiber or other synthetic materials (like fiberglass materials) that could be inhaled.
- The mask should allow for breathing without restriction.
- It should be easy to distinguish the front from the back, either by design (e.g., shape) or using two different colored materials.
- It should be easily laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

**Should I use medical masks instead of a homemade face mask?**

Medical masks, including surgical masks, medical procedure face masks and respirators (like N95 masks) are critical supplies we want to reserve for health care workers and others providing direct care. They need the most protection against droplets produced by ill patients. The homemade cloth mask is appropriate for the purpose of helping protect others by catching your respiratory droplets so they don't land on other people or surfaces.

For more information on using cloth masks and COVID-19, visit our website at [gov.nl.ca](http://gov.nl.ca)

Thank-you for doing your part in reducing the spread of COVID-19.