



Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority Inc.



Appropriate use of non-medical masks or face coverings

COVID-19 can be transmitted by people who have symptoms, and by people who are infectious but not symptomatic, in the two days before symptoms develop.

Health officials strongly recommend wearing a non-medical mask in the community or indoor public space, even if you have no symptoms. It is an additional measure you can take to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

Mandatory use of masks or face coverings

Effective Thursday, November 19, 2020, wearing a non-medical mask will now be required in all [indoor public spaces](#) in Saskatchewan.

Proper material, structure and fit

Well-designed and well-fitting masks or face coverings can prevent the spread of your infectious respiratory droplets. They may also help protect you from the infectious respiratory droplets of others.

How well a mask or face covering works depends on the materials used, how the mask is made, and most importantly, how well it fits.

A mask or face covering can be homemade or purchased, and **should**:

- be made of at least 3 layers
 - include 2 layers of a tightly woven fabric, such as cotton or linen
 - include a third (middle) layer of a filter-type fabric, such as:
 - non-woven polypropylene fabric, which is washable
 - a disposable filter
- be large enough to completely and comfortably cover the nose, mouth and chin without gaping
- allow for easy breathing
- fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops
- be comfortable and not require frequent adjustments
- be changed as soon as possible if damp or dirty
- maintain its shape after washing and drying

Filters

Filters add an extra layer of protection against COVID-19 by trapping small infectious particles. Consider wearing a mask that includes a filter or filter material as one of its layers, such as:

- non-woven polypropylene fabric, which can be found as:

- a craft fabric
- the non-woven fabric that's used to make some reusable shopping bags
- a disposable filter inserted into a pocket on the mask

Filters should **not** interfere with your breathing. Plastic films or pieces of non-breathable plastic are **not** a suitable filter material. Reusable masks with a non-woven filter layer should be washed daily, and can be washed multiple times. Disposable filters should be changed daily or as directed by the manufacturer.

People at higher risk of exposure and more severe illness

If you're at higher risk of [more severe illness if you get COVID-19](#) or [exposure to COVID-19 because of your work or living situation](#), you should wear a non-medical mask or face covering that includes a layer of filter fabric or a replaceable filter.

Children and masks

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

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.

Hearing impairments and clear masks

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

If a clear mask isn't available:

- use written communication, closed captioning or decrease background noise as much as possible
 - if writing, don't share writing items
- 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

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

Appropriate use and storage

Masks and face coverings are only effective if worn properly. Uncovering your nose or mouth while wearing one:

- eliminates any protection it may offer
- allows you to breathe in and exhale potentially infectious respiratory droplets

Don't hang the mask or face covering from your ears or place it under your chin.

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

Store it in a clean paper or cloth bag until you put it on again.

Soiled masks or face coverings should be placed in a secure, waterproof bag or container until they can be washed in the laundry.

Safety considerations

When wearing a non-medical mask or face covering:

- don't use non-medical masks or face coverings that can't be removed quickly and safely if necessary
- don't share non-medical masks or face coverings with others
- don't use non-medical masks or face coverings that impair vision or interfere with tasks
- don't place a non-medical mask or face covering on children under the age of 2
- don't use non-medical masks or face coverings made of non-breathable materials
- don't secure non-medical masks or face coverings with tape or other inappropriate materials
- don't use non-medical masks or face coverings made of materials that easily fall apart, such as tissues

Masks with exhalation valves

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

Stigma and those who can't wear masks

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

Masks aren't recommended for:

- people who suffer from illnesses or disabilities that make it difficult to put on or take off a mask
- 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 and face coverings, you can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 while also reducing your environmental impact.

Face Shields

Face shields are not a substitute for masks. Do not use face shields in place of masks.

Face shields can be used to provide eye protection, as alternative to other forms of approved forms of eye protection, such as goggles or safety glasses.

*Developed: June 2, 2020
Updated: November 18, 2020*

Resources

1. [Use of non-medical cloth masks or face coverings in community settings](#)
2. [How to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly \(video\)](#)

References

1. Government of Canada (2020). Non-medical masks and face coverings: About. Retrieve on November 18, 2020 from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>
2. Government of Saskatchewan (2020). Guidance on Cloth and Non-medical Masks. Retrieved on November 18, 2020 from: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus/guidance-on-cloth-and-non-medical-cloth-masks>