



Wearing Masks in Public During COVID-19 What you Need to Know – Frequently Asked Questions

Durham Region’s Medical Officer of Health has made non-medical masks or face coverings mandatory in all commercial establishments, starting July 10. At this point, non-medical masks or face coverings will be required while the provincial emergency orders remain in place. For more information, please see the [news release](#).

This **Frequently Asked Questions** (FAQs) document provides important information to help keep you safe this season.

Why should I wear a mask?

According to Durham Region Health Department, Ontario Ministry of Health, Public Health Ontario and the Public Health Agency of Canada, studies have shown that a high proportion of people with COVID-19 lack symptoms (or are “asymptomatic”) and that people can transmit the virus to others even *before showing* symptoms. This means the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity – for instance, speaking, coughing or sneezing – even if the person with COVID-19 has no symptoms.

In light of this, a non-medical mask (typically a cloth mask) or face covering, when worn in situations where physical distancing is a challenge helps to slow the spread of COVID-19. Specifically, wearing a non-medical or cloth mask helps people who may have the virus - and do not know it - from transmitting it to others.

How is COVID-19 spread and how will a non-medical mask or face covering help prevent the transmission of the virus?

COVID-19 is commonly spread from an infected person through:

- Exposure to respiratory droplets generated when you speak, sing, cough or sneeze;
- Close, prolonged personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands;
- Touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands.

Non-medical masks or face coverings, when worn correctly, act as a barrier to protect those around you from getting sick and passing along viruses and other communicable diseases that are spread through droplets. Wearing a non-medical mask or face

covering protects *others*. When others wear a non-medical mask or face covering, this protects *you*.

When should I wear a mask?

Starting on July 10, Durham Region's Medical Officer of Health has made non-medical masks or face coverings mandatory in all indoor commercial establishments, such as stores and businesses. This means that non-medical masks or face coverings are mandatory for all community members, with the exception of people who have health, respiratory and sensory issues, various disabilities or are unable to remove the mask without assistance; and children under the age of two.

If you are outdoors, in a situation where physical distancing is a challenge, public health experts also recommend wearing a non-medical mask or face covering to promote further safety.

Where will I need to wear a mask in Durham Region?

Starting on July 10, non-medical masks or face coverings will be required to be worn in all indoor commercial establishments. This includes retail and convenience stores (grocery stores), malls, enclosed farmers' markets and business offices open to the public.

The provincial government of Ontario highly recommends that individuals wear a non-medical mask or face covering at all times while using public transit, particularly in situations where physical distancing is a challenge.

You will not need to wear a non-medical mask or face covering at home with your immediate family members, or within your social "bubble." You also will not need to wear a non-medical mask or face covering while eating on a restaurant patio or in the workplace, where other standards apply, such as the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

Where can I get a non-medical mask or face covering?

There are a variety of high-quality, non-medical masks or face coverings available for purchase commercially from many retailers. There are also many patterns online if you decide to make your own mask.

According to the World Health Organization, it is ideal if your cloth mask be made of three layers:

1. An outer layer that should be made of water-resistant fabric;
2. An inner layer that should be water absorbent; and
3. A middle layer that acts as a filter.

What are some tips to using my non-medical mask or face covering properly and safely?

It is important to use your non-medical mask or face covering safely and properly. Prior to putting on a clean non-medical mask, your hands should be sanitized, and you should avoid touching or readjusting the mask when wearing it. If it is necessary to do so, sanitize your hands before and after adjusting. After you are done wearing the non-medical mask or face covering, store it in a clean paper or plastic bag and wash it once you are home.

What is a social bubble?

Recently, the Ontario government encouraged us to create “social circles” or “social bubbles” to help people stay more connected with family or friends while staying safe. Social bubbles can improve people’s wellbeing and are safe if done properly. A “social circle” is a group of up to 10 people who can interact and have close contact with one another without physical distancing. This may include people outside of your current household.

Within your “social circle” mask use is unnecessary. However, outside your social circle, using a non-medical mask or face covering is required inside of all commercial establishments in Durham Region.

If I attend a summer picnic or barbeque, do I need to wear a mask?

Outdoors public health guidelines suggest that we physically distance if we are interacting with people outside of our “social bubbles.” That means that if you are at a barbeque or picnic with people who are not part of your “social bubble” and are unable to physically distance, wearing a mask will reduce the risk of transmission.

What about other instances, such as waiting in a line-up to enter a restaurant patio?

If there is a line-up to get into a restaurant patio, wearing a mask would help to reduce possible transmission of the virus. However, you will not need to wear a non-medical mask or face covering while eating on a restaurant patio for the most part. If you are with those in your social bubble, you won’t need to wear a mask. If you are on a patio with those who are not in your social bubble, try to maintain physical distance from each other and use a mask when this is not possible.

Should everyone wear a mask?

There are some cases where people are unable to wear a mask. For example, very young children and infants or individuals with medical issues, such as respiratory diseases that make it difficult to wear a mask. In these cases, other public health measures such as physical distancing, coughing into a tissue or sleeve and washing and sanitizing hands should be consistently used.

While face shields protect your eyes from another person's germs, they do not keep your germs (for example your respiratory droplets) from spreading to others. So, face shields are not a substitute for non-medical masks or face coverings.

Will using a mask or face covering prevent me from contracting COVID-19?

It's important to note that masks should be used as part of a comprehensive strategy to keep you safe. On their own, masks will not completely protect you from COVID-19. People should continue to wash their hands regularly with soap and warm water or a hand sanitizer and practice physical distancing of two metres or six feet with other people who are not within their "social bubble."