

Face Masks or Cloth Face Covering

WHEN AM I REQUIRED TO WEAR A FACE MASK OR CLOTH FACE COVERING?

Effective June 26, a statewide order requires individuals to wear a face covering in indoor public spaces such as stores, offices and restaurants. The order also requires face coverings outdoors when you can't stay 6 feet apart from others.

There are exemptions, including people with certain disabilities or health conditions, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and children under the age of 2. (It's encouraged to have children ages 3-5 wear a covering if possible. Children 5 and older must wear a face covering.) There are also situations when you can remove your face covering, such as when seated at a restaurant or when recreating alone.

You do not need to wear a cloth face covering in your home when you are only with people in your household, or when you are alone in your car. You do not need to wear one when you are outdoors and people are far apart.

Additional Q&A is available at the state Department of Health. If you're an employer and have questions about the separate order regarding face coverings for employees, visit the state Department of Labor & Industries common questions page.

WHY IS THIS REQUIREMENT IN PLACE?

Cloth face masks protect other people from getting COVID-19 from us when we talk, cough or sneeze. Between 20-40 percent of people with COVID-19 don't show any symptoms but can still spread the virus to others. Recent research suggests wearing a face covering can significantly reduce the incidence of COVID-19. Until a vaccine or cure is developed, face coverings will be our best defense.

REMEMBER: Staying home is still the safest way to prevent spreading COVID-19. When out, wear your face covering, stay 6 feet apart from others, wash your hands frequently, and stay local.

FACIAL COVERING GUIDANCE FOR BUSINESSES

As of June 8, all employees are required to wear a cloth facial covering, except when working alone in an office, vehicle, or at a job site, or when the job has no in-person interaction. This applies to employees working in separate rooms or cubicles if the walls are below face level when working at their desks.

Employers must provide cloth facial coverings to employees, unless their exposure dictates a higher level of protection. Employees may choose to wear their own facial covering at work, provided it meets the minimum requirements.

Businesses must also post signage strongly encouraging customers and clients to wear cloth face coverings.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Do people need to wear face coverings while working out in a gym?**

Only if they cannot maintain 6 feet of separation from non-household members in the gym.

- **I have a reason I cannot wear a face covering. Am I required to document or prove that?**

No, the order does not require you to document or prove a reason for not wearing a face covering.

- **Should I say something if someone near me isn't wearing a face covering?**

No. Someone may have a medical reason for not wearing a face covering. Whether those around you are wearing face coverings or not, focus on keeping 6 feet of distance between you and washing your hands often.

- **I don't want to make or buy a face covering. Are there other options?**

Cloth face coverings do not need to be complicated or expensive. Save medical masks and respirators for health care workers and others in high-risk settings. Easy alternative are to use a scarf or any breathable, washable fabric, and wrap it around your face so that a couple layers of fabric are completely covering your mouth and nose.

- **When do I not have to wear a mask?**

You do not need to wear a cloth face covering when you are in your own home or in your car, if you are only with people in your own household. You also do not need to wear a cloth face covering when you are exercising outdoors and you have plenty of space. It's a good idea to keep one in your pocket, though, in case you come across other people you can't stay six feet away from. And some people may have health conditions or circumstances that make wearing a cloth face covering difficult or dangerous.

- **What should I do if I see someone not wearing a mask?**

Nothing. Some people have conditions or circumstances that would make wearing a cloth face covering difficult or dangerous. Just wear your mask and stay six feet away.

- **Is wearing a face covering safe? It feels hard to breathe when I wear one.**

While some people have health conditions that make face coverings unsafe, they are safe for nearly all of us, even if they feel uncomfortable at first and take a while to get used to. Public health experts agree face coverings are an important tool in preventing COVID and research is increasingly suggesting widespread use is effective. Make sure your face covering covers your mouth and nose but isn't overly tight or restrictive. Choose a soft fabric such as cotton knit or use a bandana or scarf if that feels more comfortable.