

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions – Masks/Face Coverings

Why are masks/face coverings important?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that spreads from close contact with someone with COVID-19 through their respiratory droplets or touching our face with contaminated hands. Respiratory droplets can include coughing, sneezing, talking or even normal breathing. When a person is singing, laughing or talking loudly, the droplets can travel further than two metres/six feet.

As a result, people may unknowingly pass the infection to others because they do not have symptoms (asymptomatic) or have not yet developed symptoms (pre-symptomatic). The highest risk for infection is with prolonged close contact.

Increasing scientific evidence indicates that the widespread use of masks and/or face coverings by all persons decreases spread of respiratory droplets, and expert opinion supports the widespread use of masks/face coverings to decrease transmission of COVID-19. Masks/face coverings are recommended because they:

- keep our respiratory droplets to ourselves and help to prevent the spread of the virus to others;
- provide a non-invasive, inexpensive way to reduce the spread of COVID-19; and
- act as a visual reminder to others to remain vigilant and stay physically distant from others.

NOTE: Masks/face coverings should not replace physical distancing.

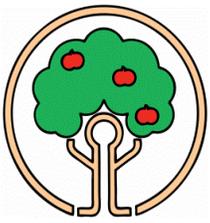
Do masks/face coverings protect against COVID-19?

Wearing a mask/face covering helps to trap your droplets and protects people who are around you. Since some people who are infected with COVID-19 may have the virus and not know it, whenever people are going out and might come into contact with other people, they should always wear a mask/face covering. When other people wear a mask/face covering they are helping to protect you as well.

Mask/face covering wearing cannot guarantee protection from the virus and should always be done in addition to measures such as frequent handwashing, avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands, practicing physical distancing and staying at home if you are sick.

To protect yourself and others from COVID-19, everyone should:

- Stay home as much as possible
- Avoid groups of people and crowded spaces
- Maintain physical distance (at least two metres or six feet) whenever possible
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer



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- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing with tissues or your sleeve and wash your hands immediately after

What to know when choosing a mask/face covering?

What type of mask/face mask should I wear?

There are many types of masks available including:

- cloth masks (can be washed and reused),
- disposable masks (can only be worn once), and
- medical masks (such as N95 respirators that should be reserved for front-line health care workers).

When choosing a mask/face coverings, make sure the mask/face covering:

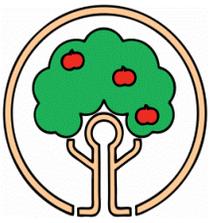
- If cloth:
 - is made from at least two layers or tightly woven cotton or linen;
 - has no seams over the mouth and nose through which air may leak;
- covers the nose, mouth and chin while still being easy to breath through;
- fits to the head with ties or ear loops without gaping or impairing vision;
- is comfortable enough, to avoid the urge to readjust while wearing the cloth mask/face covering;
- maintains its' shape after washing and drying;
- is not made from non-breathable materials such as plastic.

When should you wear a mask/face covering?

Residents should wear masks/face coverings when going to public places or entering enclosed public settings. Masks/face covering can be made with household items or purchased materials, and it is important to ensure they are used and cleaned properly. Be respectful of people who are not wearing a mask, as some health conditions make breathing difficult while wearing a mask.

Residents should also wear masks/face coverings:

- **If you are sick:** If you are coughing or sneezing, wear a mask/face covering to protect people around you from getting sick. This is very important if you go to an appointment, clinic, or a hospital. If you are sick, you should not be going out in public for any other reason than to seek medical care. When seeking medical care, follow mask/face covering instructions given to you by a health care provider.
- **If you are caring for someone who is sick:** If you are taking care of someone who is coughing or sneezing, wear a mask/face covering when you are within 2 metres (6 feet) of them. The person you are taking care of should also wear a mask/face covering to protect you from their illness.



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- **If you are going to a public place:** If you are outside of your home where physical distancing is difficult to maintain, like when visiting the pharmacy or grocery store, wear a mask/face covering. When wearing a mask/face covering in public, continue to practice physical distancing by keeping a 2 metre (6 feet) distance from others.

For more info:

- [RCDHU Do's and Don'ts of Using Non-Medical Masks](#)
- [RCDHU Non-medical Mask Use when Shopping \(Community Use\)](#)
- [VIDEO : Why, when and where should I wear a cloth mask?](#)

What should I know about a mask/face covering?

Note: You should always practice physical distancing and hand hygiene when wearing a mask/face covering.

- Masks/face coverings only work when used properly and when combined with frequent hand hygiene with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Your risk of infection increases if you are frequently touching your face or mask/ face covering to readjust it.
- Replace the mask/face covering as soon as it is damp, crumpled or dirty.
- Do not share a mask/face covering with another person.
- Wash your mask/face covering with other items using a hot cycle with regular laundry detergent and dry thoroughly.
- If using a mask/face covering, there should be at least two layers of tightly woven fabric, like cotton.
- All face coverings that cannot be cleaned should be thrown out.
- Masks/face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is unable to remove the mask/face covering without assistance.

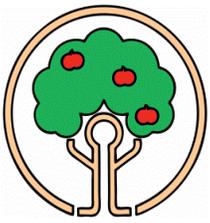
How do I put on a mask/face covering?

- Before touching the mask/face covering, wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Move hair away from your face.
- Put the mask/face covering over your mouth and nose and secure it to your head or ears with the ties or elastics. Ensure the mask/face covering fits snugly and that there are no gaps on the top of your nose, or around your cheeks and chin.
- Clean your hands again after you put on your mask/face covering.
- Do not touch the mask/face covering once you have it on. If you need to touch the mask/face covering, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after you touch the mask/face covering.

Visit us at www.rcdhu.com or call 613-735-8654 or 1-800-267-1097

"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"

July 09, 2020



For more info: Public Health Ontario – [Steps to Put on a Mask](#)

How do I remove a mask/face covering?

- Clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer before removing your mask/face covering.
- Remove the mask/face covering by grasping the ties or ear loops and removing from your ears. Do not touch the front of the mask/face covering while removing it.
- Once removed, place your mask/face covering temporarily in a plastic bag until you return home, or dispose of it in a lined garbage bin. Do not place the mask/face covering in your pocket or purse. If you will be reusing your mask/face covering, place it directly into the washing machine when you return home.
- Do not leave your mask/face covering in a shopping cart or on the ground.

For more info: Public Health Ontario – [Steps to Take Off a Respirator/Mask](#)

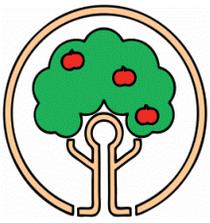
Tips for proper use of a mask/face covering

- Wash or sanitize your hands before putting on, and after taking off the mask/face covering.
- Place the mask/face covering over your nose, mouth and chin.
- Avoid touching your face and mask/face covering while using it.
- Do not share your mask/face covering with others.
- Change your mask/face covering if it becomes moist or dirty.
- Do not leave the mask/face covering under your chin, hanging from your ear or anywhere else on your head.
- Remove the mask/face covering by the ear loops without touching the front of the mask/face covering.
- Place the mask/face covering in a plastic/paper bag or directly in the laundry bin to be washed.
- Wash the mask/face covering with other clothing items and use the hot cycle and dryer settings.
- [RCDHU Do's and Don'ts of Using Non-Medical Masks](#)
- [RCDHU Non-medical Mask Use when Shopping \(Community Use\)](#)
- [National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health Laundry Poster](#)

How do I wash, re-use, and discard a mask/face covering?

Wearing a mask/face covering can increase your risk of infection if you touch your face more frequently to adjust it or if you do not wash your hands before putting it on and taking it off. All parts of masks/face coverings can become contaminated by breathing or when touched by your hands.

Masks/face coverings become contaminated, especially when touched by your hands. When taking off a mask/face covering, follow these steps:



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- After washing your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, remove your mask/face covering by pulling the ties or ear loops away from your ears.
- If your mask/face covering has a removable, non-reusable filter, make sure to remove and throw out the filter before machine or hand-washing your mask/face covering.
- For machine washing, put the mask/face covering directly into the washing machine or in a bag that can be emptied into the washing machine. Throw out the bag after you have used it to store your mask/face covering. If the bag is washable you can wash it with your mask/face covering. Wash your hands again with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after handling your mask/face covering.
- Wash the masks/face coverings with other laundry using a hot water cycle.
- For hand washing, use laundry detergent and water as hot as you can stand, then dry thoroughly.
- When discarding damaged or worn out masks/face coverings, drop them in a lined garbage bin.
- Do not leave any discarded masks/face coverings in places where others can come in contact with them such as shopping carts, public seats, bus stops or on the ground.
- Masks/face coverings can be re-used throughout the day if not soiled and undamaged. With clean hands, remove the mask/face covering from your face and fold it in half so that the outer surface is inwards (so that the contaminated outer surface is not contacting anything during storage) and place it in a clean, sealable bag until ready to use it again the same day.
- Disposable masks/face coverings should not be washed, reused or recycled.

Who should not wear a mask/face covering?

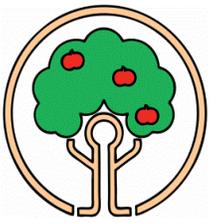
- Children under the age of two years old.
- Anyone who has breathing difficulties
- Anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise cannot remove the mask/face covering without assistance.
- [Ontario Face Coverings and Face Masks Page](#)

How can I make a mask/face covering?

For details on how to make your own mask/face covering(s), visit:

- Health Canada's website for [sew or no-sew instructions on how to make a home-made mask](#)
- Public Health Agency of Canada's [How to make a non-medical mask at home](#)
- CHEO's [Kids and masks: tips from an expert](#)

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Can a face shield be used as a substitute or a replacement for a mask/face covering?

A face shield is not a substitute for wearing a mask/face covering as it does not filter respiratory droplets. A face shield may provide additional protection for the wearer against droplets expelled from another person, however these droplets may still be inhaled around the shield. Respiratory droplets expelled by the wearer may escape around the sides of the face shield, which therefore provides less protection to others. If you choose to wear a face shield, we recommend - if possible - to wear it in addition to a properly fitted masks/face coverings.

Is a face shield a good alternative for someone who can't wear a mask/face covering?

A face shield would not be considered an equal substitute for a mask/face covering as it does not provide filtering capacity. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) supports the use of face shields as a "better than nothing" alternative to masks/face coverings if there is a shortage of masks/face coverings for populations who are not able to properly wear masks/face coverings, such as individuals with a respiratory condition that prevents them from wearing a mask/face covering. The WHO makes note that face shields are inferior to masks/face coverings at preventing the spread of an infection through droplets and at a minimum should extend below the chin and cover the sides of the face.

Are masks/face coverings mandatory in Ontario?

While the province of Ontario has not made masks/face coverings mandatory, some municipalities now have provisions in place (or soon to be) for mandatory masks/face coverings. If you're travelling within the province, please be sure to:

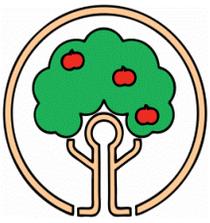
- bring a mask/face covering with you,
- check the area you are travelling to for mandatory masks/face coverings orders or by-laws.

Are masks/face coverings mandatory in Renfrew County and District?

In Renfrew County and District, the *COVID-19 Directive for Masks/Face Coverings* comes into effect July 14, 2020. This directive requires that masks/face coverings be worn in enclosed public spaces.

Where can I get a mask/face covering?

DISCLAIMER: *The following vendors were identified to us via social media and other Renfrew County and District residents. Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) does not endorse any particular vendor of cloth masks, nor can we ensure that any vendor is able to maintain stock of these products. We are not liable if there are any issues related to the vendor or the purchased product. The vendors below are listed as a convenience with the intent of*



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promoting the wearing of cloth masks in settings where physical distancing is not possible. If you are aware of other Renfrew County and District-based or Canada-based vendors producing cloth masks that are not currently listed below, please let us know at: media@rcdhu.com.

Vendors can be found under the “What you need to know about wearing a mask” drop down or accordion, which is found at <https://www.rcdhu.com/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-2/>.

Visit Health Canada's website for [sew or no-sew instructions on how to make a home-made mask](#)

If you are experiencing difficulties obtaining a mask/face covering, please contact RCDHU at media@rcdhu.com or call 613-735-8651 ext: 516.

Additional Resources

- [Government of Ontario](#): Face coverings and face masks-About
- [Public Health Ontario Document](#): masks and face coverings
- [Health Canada](#): masks and face coverings-About
- [Masks4Canada](#): Grassroots group of members from diverse ages and backgrounds, to promote and educate the use of effective, re-usable, masks/face coverings where physical distancing is not possible. Great source of evidence and other helpful information.