

## COVID-19 FAQs re mask requirements

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Beginning Monday, August 17, 2020 at 12:01 AM, it is mandatory that people in the general public wear a mask or other form of face-covering in indoor public spaces.

This page answers many of the common questions that people have about this new requirement. The content will be updated as we receive more questions and information. Please continue to refer to the website for up to date and accurate information.

Please note that there are reasons where someone may not be able to wear mask/face covering and who do not need to follow the mandatory mask directive for business (<https://www.NWHU.com/mandatorymasks> ) and for that reason these individuals are exempt. The reason may not be visible to others and individuals are not expected to share their reasons.

A full list of the exemptions are outlined in the [Letter of Instruction to Employers and Business Owners and Operators](#) from Dr. Young-Hoon, the Medical Officer of Health.

### Are masks or face coverings required in all enclosed spaces?

The [Letter of Instruction](#) applies to enclosed public spaces of businesses and organizations that can be accessed by the public.

NWHU encourages operators of indoor spaces that are not accessible to the public to have a policy or a plan to ensure the protection of individuals in those spaces, including their staff. NWHU continues to recommend that individuals wear a mask or other form of face covering in indoor spaces, especially when maintaining physical distancing cannot be guaranteed. The Ontario Ministry of Health has provided guidance documents for many organizations that are not considered to be public spaces. These can be found online at [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019\\_guidance.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx).

### **Is my business or organization included in the directive? What is an enclosed public space?**

Enclosed Public Space means indoor public spaces of businesses and organizations, accessed by the public. These include but are not limited to:

- restaurants, cafés, cafeterias, banquet halls;
- retail establishments and shopping malls;
- churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, or other places of worship;
- libraries, museums, art galleries, recreational facilities, bingo halls, community centers and halls, cinemas, theatres, concert venues, special event venues, convention centers, or other similar entertainment, cultural, or leisure facilities;
- sports facilities, sports clubs, gyms, yoga studios, dance studios, and stadiums;
- real estate open houses
- common areas of hotels, motels, or short-term rental premises such as lobbies, elevators, meeting rooms, rest rooms, laundry rooms, gyms, and kitchens;
- public transportation, bus shelters, and private transportation for hire, including taxis, limousines and rideshare services
- spas, hair salons, barbers, nail salons, and other personal service settings that are subject to health and safety protocols provided by the Province of Ontario during the provincial emergency

Schools, child care centres, day camps, health care facilities and other indoor spaces that are not accessible to the public such as residential buildings or condominiums are not considered an enclosed public space. Note that many of these spaces have other government guidelines or requirements related to COVID-19 that apply to them.

### **What do I have to do as the operator of a business or organization?**

You need to do 6 things:

1. Have a policy that requires everyone in your enclosed public space to wear a mask, with some specific exceptions.
2. Display signage about the mask requirement in a location that allows customers and clients to read the signage before entering.
3. Ask everyone to wear a mask if they enter your space without one, or if they remove their mask for an extended period of time while in your establishment.
4. Train your staff on the policy and support them to implement it.
5. Have a hand washing / sanitizing station at all entrances to your space for people to use.
6. Provide a copy of your policy upon request to a public health inspector or other person authorized to enforce the *Reopening Ontario Act Ontario*, Regulation 364/20.

### **Why are we doing this now?**

As businesses, organizations, schools and day care centres re-open in our region, there is a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 because more people are interacting in the communities.

A mask/face covering that securely covers an individual's mouth, nose and chin can act as a barrier that reduces the chances of respiratory droplets spreading the virus to other people. The mask/face covering also reduces the chances of contaminating nearby surfaces which can also lead to transmission of the virus.

As we prepare for a possible increase in the spread of the virus, using a mask/face covering is one more measure to protect ourselves, our families and our communities from COVID-19. To achieve this benefit, we need to implement this measure before the virus is circulating in greater numbers.

### **When does this directive go into effect?**

The directive goes into effect at of 12:01 am on Monday, August 17, 2020.

### **Do businesses and organizations need to supply face coverings to the public?**

No. Businesses and organizations are not required to supply masks for the public. Individuals are encouraged to bring their own mask or face coverings. Establishments may choose to provide masks to the public for free or at a cost, but it is not a requirement. If you do decide to provide masks, they must be handled and stored in a sanitary manner.

### **How can my business or organization notify customers, patrons, employees or visitors about mask use before entering?**

[Signage for mandatory masking is available here.](#) Businesses and organizations can also produce their own signage. Signage must be displayed in a location that allows customers and clients to read the signage before entering. Verbal reminders can also be provided.

### **How is this being enforced?**

Every business and organization falling under this directive is required to adopt a Mandatory Mask Policy. A sample policy (this will be available soon) is available for download from the health unit website. This policy should be implemented and enforced in 'good faith' and should primarily be used as a means to educate people on mask or face covering use in indoor public spaces.

Northwestern Health Unit and other partners will enforce the requirement that businesses and organizations have a mask policy and implement their policy. NWHU does not enforce the requirement that individuals wear a mask in an enclosed public space.

### **What is considered a mask or face covering?**

A mask refers to a cloth (non-medical) mask, medical mask or other face coverings such as a bandana, scarf or cloth that serves the purpose of filtering respiratory droplets and securely covers the nose, mouth, and chin, and is in contact with the surrounding face without gapping. The mask should be comfortable to the wearer and allow for easy breathing and should not need frequent repositioning or readjusting. For more information, including cleaning re-usable masks, see [Masks and Face Coverings](#).

A face shield is not a substitute for wearing a face mask 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. When wearing a face shield, it is recommended to also wear a properly fitted cloth mask.

### **Should employees be wearing masks?**

Employees working in an enclosed public space should wear a mask unless they are exempt or are working from behind a barrier such as plexiglass. Businesses and organizations can adopt separate policies and practices, including masking where applicable, for keeping their staff and workplace safe. This includes areas of their

workplace that are not accessible to the public. These areas are not included in the instructions provided for enclosed public spaces.

### **Should a business turn anyone away who is not wearing a mask?**

The [Letter of Instruction](#) does not require businesses and organizations to turn away people who are not wearing a mask or face covering. Operators must recognize that there are exemptions for individuals who are unable to or cannot wear a mask. Such persons should not be turned away and should not be asked to provide proof of their exemptions.

Note that all clients must wear a mask or face covering at all times while receiving services at personal service settings. The only exception is when clients are receiving services on an area of their face that would otherwise be covered by a face covering or they are meet the exemptions for wearing a mask.

Other settings such as schools, day cares or congregate living facilities also have specific guidelines that they need to follow, separate from this [Letter of Instruction](#) about enclosed public spaces.

NWHU is encouraging that education and promotion of mask use is a primary consideration for businesses and organizations in enacting their policy for the use of masks/face coverings.

### **Are there any circumstances when people are permitted to remove their masks while in an indoor public setting?**

Temporary removal of the mask or face covering is permitted where necessary when:

- Actively engaging in an athletic or fitness activity including water-based activities
- Consuming food or drink
- Receiving services in a personal service setting on an area of the face that would otherwise be covered by a mask or face covering
- For any emergency or medical purpose

### **Does the Letter of Instruction apply to home-based businesses?**

Yes, if you have any part of your business that is accessible to the public. The portion of the home that is open and accessible to the public as part of the business would fall under the [Letter of Instruction](#), and a mask policy would be needed.

And, if the home-based business is classified as a personal service setting (e.g., hair salon, massage therapy, personal counselling) then there are other provincial guidelines that you need to follow.

### **What about recreational facilities and gyms.**

The [Letter of Instruction](#) applies to all recreational facilities. Members of the public are required to wear a mask or face covering except when they are actively engaging in an athletic or fitness activity including water-based activities.

Facility staff, including lifeguards in public spaces who are not separated by a physical barrier such as plexiglass must also wear a mask of face covering.

### **Are there any suitable substitutions for alcohol-based hand sanitizer?**

Yes, employers, business owners and operators can substitute a hand sanitizer that is authorized by the Public Health Agency of Canada. A list of authorized products is available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19.html>

### **What do I need to do if I am a business that is not open to the public?**

NWHU recommends that all employers have a policy or a plan in place for enclosed spaces that are not accessible to the public. This would include spaces that are used by employees, agents or others. This can address a number of measures including:

- Physical distancing of two metres;
- Face covering requirements, especially where physical distancing is not possible;
- Routine screening for COVID-19 symptoms, including requiring those with symptoms to stay home and advising them to be tested for COVID-19;
- Promoting hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette; and
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces.

#### **What else is NWHU doing related to masking?**

- Working to provide you with more information and guidance on masks/face coverings and how to use and care for them properly;
- Working to improve access to mask/face coverings for people who may not have this currently; and
- Working with businesses and other organizations to promote mask/face coverings.

#### **How does the requirement apply to restaurants and bars?**

- The requirement to wear a mask applies to restaurants and bars. Customers can remove their mask when they are eating and drinking, but must wear a mask when in the lobby or reception area, when walking to their table, and when going to the restrooms. Restaurant and bar staff who are not behind a physical barrier such as plexiglass, or who cannot maintain a distance of 2 metres / 6 feet from each other behind that barrier, must also wear a mask or face covering.
- Please note that there are other government guidelines that also apply to your restaurant and bar. The space needs to be arranged so that the tables are at least 2 metres / 6 feet apart. All patrons are required to be seated at all times, in both indoor and outdoor areas, with limited exceptions; and you must keep client logs for a period of 30 days and to disclose the client logs to the medical officer of health or an inspector under the Health Protection and Promotion Act on request, to support case and contact tracing.