

# Cloth Face Coverings Guidance During COVID-19

## Summary of April 27, 2021 changes

- Updated mask requirements to align with CDC language.

## Introduction

Face coverings or masks, along with six feet of physical distancing, significantly slow or stop the spread of COVID-19. Now that many counties are partially reopened, it's critical people wear face coverings and practice physical distancing in public. When you wear a face covering, you help protect others around you as well as yourself. Face coverings work best when everyone wears one.

A cloth face covering is anything that completely covers your mouth and nose, and fits securely on the sides of your face and under your chin. It should be made of two or more layers of tightly woven fabric with ties or straps that go around your head or behind your ears. A face shield with a drape can be used by people with developmental, behavioral, or medical conditions that prevent them from wearing a cloth face covering. Face shields with a cloth drape may also be used; including by children in childcare, day camp, and K-12 settings if a cloth face covering is not tolerated. In the workplace, masks or respirators may be required as they are more protective than cloth face coverings.

Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [recommends strategies](#) to improve mask fitting to more effectively slow the spread of COVID-19. These strategies include wearing a cloth mask over a medical procedure mask, knotting the ear loops of a medical procedure mask, using a mask fitter, or using a nylon covering over a mask. In addition, DOH does not recommend the use of masks with exhalation valves or vents, or single layer bandanas and gaiters. Respirators with exhalation valves are okay when used in accordance with guidance published by DOH and [L&I](#).

It is important to wear a mask in all public settings, combined with continued implementation of effective public health measures such as vaccination, physical distancing, hand hygiene, and isolation and quarantine.

## Current Mandates and Health Orders

There are four public orders that combined, emphasize the importance of wearing cloth face coverings and recommend and/or require people to wear them in public places. When more Washingtonians wear face coverings in public, the effect can greatly reduce transmission of COVID-19 from person-to-person, saving lives and helping open the economy safely and wisely.

**[The workplace order:](#)** Washington employers are required to ensure workers are wearing face coverings at work in almost all situations. Employers must provide face coverings if workers do

not have them; employers are responsible to comply with this order, and the Department of Labor & Industries enforces it.

**[The general public order:](#)** This order from the secretary of health requires Washingtonians, with some exceptions, to wear face coverings in public spaces (indoors in most situations, and outdoors when 6 feet of physical distancing can't be maintained). People are individually responsible to comply with this order.

**[The governor's order for customers in businesses:](#)** This order from Governor Jay Inslee mandates that businesses cannot allow customers to enter their premises without face coverings. Other accommodations can be offered for customers who cannot wear masks. Businesses, with the help of local law enforcement if needed, are responsible to comply with this order.

**[The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention order:](#)** This order from the CDC requires the wearing of face coverings by travelers to prevent spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. This order must be followed by passengers on all public transportation including but not limited to airplanes, ships, ferries, trains, subways, buses, taxis, and ride-shares. Operators of public transportation must require all passengers to wear face coverings when boarding, disembarking, and for the duration of travel. More information can be found on the [CDC's webpage for Legal Authorities](#).

## General Recommendations

A cloth face covering alone will not prevent the spread of COVID-19. You should still stay six feet (or two meters) away from non-household members when you wear a face covering, avoid crowded or poorly ventilated spaces, and wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wear a mask inside your home if someone you live with is sick with symptoms of COVID-19 or has tested positive for COVID-19.

Please visit [DOH's webpage on face coverings](#) for a complete list of frequently asked questions. Additional information can be found on the [CDC's webpage for face masks](#).

## When You've Been Fully Vaccinated

People are considered fully vaccinated  $\geq 2$  weeks after they have received the second dose in a 2-dose series (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or  $\geq 2$  weeks after they have received a single-dose vaccine (Johnson and Johnson (J&J)/Janssen).

Note: if it has been less than 2 weeks since your shot, or if you still need to get your second dose, you are NOT fully protected. Keep taking all [prevention steps](#) until you are fully vaccinated.

If you've been fully vaccinated:

- Fully vaccinated individuals can participate in outdoor activities and recreation without a mask, [except in certain crowded settings and venues](#).

- You can gather indoors at a private residence with other fully vaccinated people without wearing a mask.
- You can gather indoors at a private residence with unvaccinated people from one other household (for example, visiting with relatives who all live together) without masks, unless any of those people or anyone they live with has an [increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19](#).
- If you've been around someone who has COVID-19, you do not need to stay away from others or get tested unless you have symptoms.
  - However, if you live in a group setting, like a correctional or detention facility or group home, and are around someone who has COVID-19, you should still stay away from others for 14 days and get tested, even if you don't have symptoms.

Regardless of your vaccination status, you should still take steps to [protect yourself and others](#) while in public settings. This includes wearing a mask, staying at least six feet apart from others, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces. In addition, you should still avoid medium or large-sized gatherings and continue to watch for [symptoms of COVID-19](#), especially if you've been around someone who is sick.

Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

## FAQ

### What is a cloth face covering?

A cloth face covering is fabric that covers your nose and mouth and fit snugly against the sides of the face and under the chin. It can be:

- A sewn mask with ties or straps that go around the head or behind the ears.
- Several layers of fabric tied around a person's head.
- Made from a variety of materials like cotton, fleece, or linen.
- Factory-made or home-made.

If you would like to sew your own cloth face covering (mask) see: [How to Sew a Face Mask](#)

### Do cloth face coverings stop the spread of COVID-19?

Cloth face coverings can reduce the release of virus particles into the air when a person with COVID-19 speaks, coughs, or sneezes. You can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 when you wear a cloth face covering, even if you don't think you have COVID-19.

### How do we know face coverings are effective?

Before the pandemic, there was not much research about the benefit of wearing cloth face coverings to prevent COVID-19. Some researchers compared countries that promoted face coverings as part of their early response to countries, like the US, that did not. The countries that promoted face coverings had fewer cases than countries that did not. Research is

continuing and we are still learning more, but COVID-19 can be spread by people who do not know they have it. The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread by droplets you exhale as you breathe, as well as when you talk, sing, cough or sneeze. If you wear a face covering, you help keep those droplets to yourself.

### Who should wear a cloth face covering?

Most people should wear a face covering in public. Wear a face covering in indoor public spaces except when you eat, and outdoors when you cannot stay six feet (or two meters) away from others at all times.

Some people should not wear cloth face coverings:

- Children under two years of age.
- People who have disabilities that:
  - Prevent them from comfortably wearing or taking off face coverings.
  - Prevent them from communicating while wearing face coverings.
- People who have respiratory conditions or breathing trouble.
- People who have been told by a medical, legal, or behavioral health professional not to wear face coverings.

### When should I wear a cloth face covering?

You should wear a cloth face covering when you are in public with other people, especially indoors.

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 or with family members. You do not need to wear one when you exercise outdoors with plenty of space. It's a good idea to keep a face covering in your pocket in case you come across other people.

Whether you are fully vaccinated or not, cloth face coverings are required in all indoor public spaces and in any outdoor public space where a minimum of 6 feet of distance can't be maintained at all times.

### How do I care for my cloth face covering?

Wash your cloth face covering after each use, at least daily. Use detergent and hot water. Dry the face covering completely on your dryer's high-heat setting. If you do not have a dryer, air dry your face covering in direct sunlight if possible. If you must reuse your face covering before you wash it, wash your hands after you put it back on and do not touch your face.

Do not use cloth face coverings that:

- No longer cover your nose and mouth.
- Are stretched out or do not stay on your face.
- Have damaged ties or straps.
- Have holes or tears in the fabric.
- Face coverings are less effective when wet.

## More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

A person's race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19- this is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics Cloth Face Coverings for Children during COVID-19](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)
- [Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19 \(CDC\)](#)
- [How to Make An Accessible, Deaf-Friendly Face Mask \(HSDC\)](#)

**Have more questions?** Call our COVID-19 Information hotline: **1-800-525-0127**

Monday – 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., Tuesday – Sunday and [observed state holidays](#), 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email [civil.rights@doh.wa.gov](mailto:civil.rights@doh.wa.gov).