Guidelines/Protocols for Face Coverings and Masks During COVID-19 Pandemic

Scope

The guidelines outlined in this document will assist in the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) related to **Face Coverings and Masks** and will help to ensure the appropriate COVID-19 health and safety considerations for the protection of all members of the McMaster community.

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Hierarchy of Hazard Control

Hazard mitigation should always focus on implementing control measures to eliminate or reduce risk. For this purpose, the hierarchy of controls must be considered. This hierarchy can be applied to any hazard in the workplace including COVID-19. A brief overview of this concept is highlighted below.

Indoor Spaces

To further help limit the spread of COVID-19, McMaster University has implemented a measure that calls for non-medical masks or face coverings to be worn inside all McMaster buildings, with limited exceptions such as:

- a medical condition that inhibits one’s ability to wear a non-medical mask or face covering
- inability to put on or remove a non-medical mask or face covering without help from someone else
- receiving accommodations according to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 or the Human Rights Code
- working in an area which is designated for the employee and not accessible to members of the public or is behind a physical barrier, e.g., private office with a closed and locked door

See the complete list of exceptions here.
Individuals who are in an indoor space will be required to wear non-medical masks or face coverings with the exception of the McMaster University Medical Centre, where individuals must wear a minimum Level 1 medical surgical mask.

Individuals working within 2 meters of others who are unmasked must wear eye protection.

Avoid wearing any face coverings or masks with exhalation valves. These masks may protect the user but not those around them from COVID-19 as the exhaled air is not filtered.

**Non-Medical Masks/Face Coverings**

Non-medical masks or face coverings are required in all indoor spaces.

Face coverings/non-medical masks are intended to limit the risk of the wearer exposing others to undetected illness or infection, including COVID-19. These masks are not regulated and are very different from medical surgical masks or N95 masks. Wearing face coverings does not eliminate the need for physical distancing practices or hand hygiene.

Public Health recommends 3 layers for face coverings: 2 layers should be tightly woven material fabric, such as cotton or linen. The third (middle) layer should be a filter-type fabric, such as non-woven polypropylene fabric.

Face shields are meant to be used for barrier protection for the facial area and would not be considered a substitute for wearing a face mask or face covering. Face shields do not provide any filtering against respiratory droplets. A face shield may protect the wearer against droplets expelled from another person, however, some of these droplets may still be inhaled around the shield.

If you choose to wear a face shield, it is recommended - if possible - to wear it in addition to a properly fitted cloth masks.

Clear plastic mouth shields are not a suitable face covering since they do not fit tightly around the mouth, nose and chin. Mouth shields allow infectious respiratory droplets to spread outside the mask, and do not help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**Surgical Masks**

For more information, contact Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services (EOHSS)

*Updated as of September 13, 2021*
A surgical mask is a loose-fitting, disposable device that creates a physical barrier between the mouth and nose of the wearer and potential contaminants in the immediate environment. Surgical medical masks are regulated. If worn properly, a surgical mask is meant to help block large-particle droplets, splashes, sprays, or splatter that may contain germs (viruses and bacteria), keeping it from reaching your mouth and nose. Surgical masks are categorized accordingly, Level 1 - for low risk of fluid exposure, Level 2 - for moderate risk of fluid exposure, Level 3 - for high risk of fluid exposure.

Under certain circumstances due to the nature of the work or workplace where physical distancing 2m (6ft) is not possible, surgical masks will be provided by the supervisor in order to continue to work safely. A Level 1 surgical mask is sufficient for most workers performing non-medical work, i.e. laboratories, office setting, custodial etc.

**Masks for Healthcare Workers - N95 Masks**

An N95 mask or N95 respirator is a particulate-filtering face piece respirator that meets the *U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)* N95 classification of air filtration, meaning that it filters at least 95% of airborne particles. N95 masks should be kept for health care workers and others providing direct care to COVID-19 patients.

In the limited circumstances where employees are required to wear an N95 mask, they must first have specific training and respirator/mask fit testing successfully completed by Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services (EOHSS) or Faculty of Health Sciences Safety Office (FHSSO).

**Hygiene Practices**

When wearing a mask, it is important that the following measures are taken:

**Donning (On)**

- Wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer if water is not readily available.
- Choose a mask with the correct size and fit.
- Place the mask carefully, ensuring it covers the mouth and nose, with the nosepiece on top.
- Place loops around each ear or tie securely to minimize any gaps between the face and the mask.
- Stretch mask to fit under chin and mold nosepiece to bridge of nose.
- Avoid touching the mask while wearing.
Doffing (Off)

- Before removing mask, wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer if water is not readily available.
- Remove the mask using the appropriate technique: do not touch the front of the mask but untie it/remove from behind, only touching the loops or ties of the mask.
- Place disposal masks immediately into garbage.
- After removal or whenever a used mask is inadvertently touched, clean hands using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water.
- Wash/replace masks as soon as they become damp or soiled with a new clean, dry mask.

Resources

- Public Health Ontario
- Government of Ontario
- Government of Canada
- Public Health Ontario – Mask Use for Non-Healthcare Workers
- Public Health Ontario – Donning (On)
- Public Health Ontario – Doffing (Off)
- Government of Canada – Face Coverings and Face Masks