

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

Scope

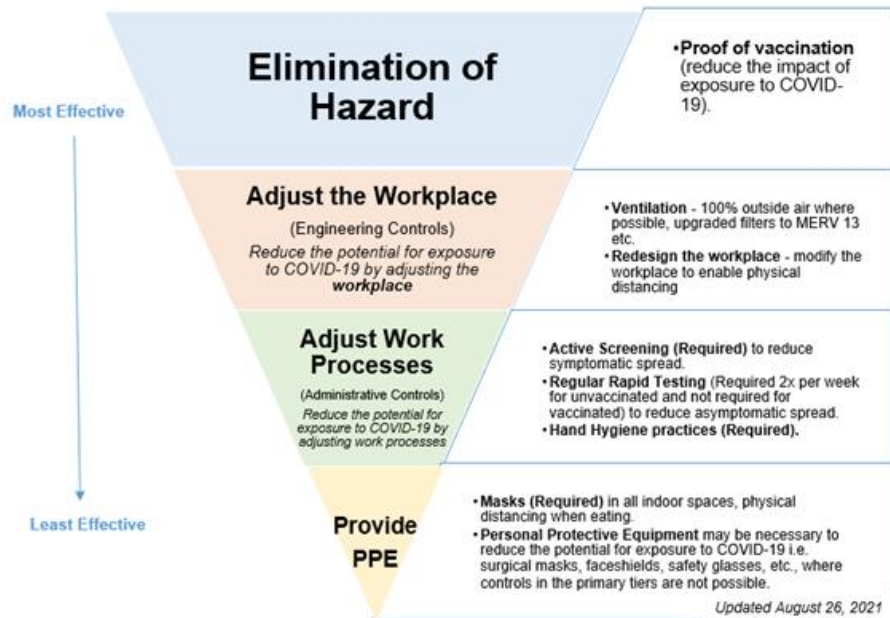
The guidelines outlined in this document will assist in the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) related to **Face Coverings and Masks** and will help to ensure the appropriate COVID-19 health and safety considerations for the protection of all members of the McMaster community.

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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 are required to wear non-medical masks or face coverings (a minimum of 2 layers) 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**.

All face coverings or masks must fit well without gaps covering chin, mouth and nose at all times. Any face coverings or masks with exhalation valves are not acceptable. These masks may protect the user but not those around them from COVID-19 as the exhaled air is not filtered.

While non-medical masks and face covering can help prevent the spread of COVID-19, medical masks and respirators provide better protection. No matter which type of mask you choose, proper fit is a key factor in its effectiveness.

Medical masks are recommended for:

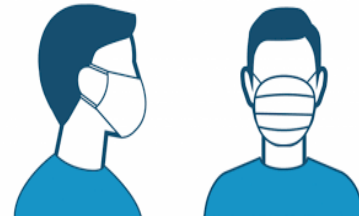
- anyone who has tested positive for or has symptoms of COVID-19
- people caring for someone who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19
- people who live in a crowded setting with someone who has tested positive or has symptoms of COVID-19
- people who are at risk of more severe disease or outcomes from COVID-19
- people who are at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 because of their living situation

Individuals in the above situations could also consider using a respirator such as an N95 which can offer more protection.

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 a mask with 2 layers as a minimum and best practice of 3 layers.

A non-medical mask should consist of:

- multiple layers, including
 - at least 2 layers of tightly woven fabric, such as cotton and
 - a third, middle layer of filter-type fabric, such as non-woven polypropylene
- materials that are breathable

Using a filter as a middle layer in your non-medical mask can help to trap smaller infectious respiratory particles.

You can include a filter in your non-medical mask by:

- adding a filter fabric as a middle layer
- inserting a disposable filter into a pocket on the inside of the mask
 - filters can be purchased or you can prepare your own using a piece of filter fabric

Reusable masks with an integrated filter layer can be washed multiple times.

Disposable filters should be:

- changed as directed by the manufacturer
- removed from the mask before washing

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 should be worn in addition to a properly fitted mask.

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.

The following pictures are examples of shields, face coverings or masks that are **not** recommended or acceptable to protect against COVID-19.



Surgical Masks

A surgical mask is a looser-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.



In higher risk settings as indicated above, surgical masks may be considered offering increased protection. Surgical masks must be worn in the workplace where physical distancing 2m (6ft) is not possible. A Level 1 surgical mask is sufficient for most workers performing non-medical work, i.e. laboratories, office setting, custodial etc.

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 may be considered in higher risk settings as indicated above. It is important to wear an N95 that fits properly. N95s are available in a variety of sizes. Users must ensure that a seal check is completed to ensure a proper fit. Quantitative fit testing may be warranted at the discretion of EOHSS or FHSSO on a case by case basis.

Seal check for N95 mask:

- Put on the mask.
- Place both hands over the mask.
- Breathe in and out.
- If you have a good seal, the facepiece should collapse slightly when you inhale.
- As you exhale, you should not feel air leaking out.
- If you have air leaks, check that nothing is obstructing (blocking) the sealing surface, adjust the nose piece or straps, and repeat the user seal check.

Do not wear a respirator that cannot pass the seal checks successfully.

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](#)
- [CDC – Donning N95](#)
- [CDC – N95 User Seal Check](#)
- [CCOHS - PPE](#)