

## MA Department of Public Health

### Face Covering Q&A

#### Why do I need to wear a face covering?

The Baker-Polito Administration issued an [order](#) requiring face coverings in public places where social distancing is not possible to protect residents and slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus effective May 6, 2020.

COVID-19 is spread mainly by person to person contact and the best means of slowing the spread of the virus is by [practicing social distancing](#) and by minimizing personal contact.

Not everyone who has COVID-19 is symptomatic. Wearing a face covering reduces the chance of transmitting the virus to another person and vice versa.

Wearing a face covering is one of several measures we can take to prevent the spread of the virus. The other measures include: maintaining a distance of 6 feet from other people; frequently washing your hands and using hand sanitizer; and staying home if you are not well.

#### How do you define a “face covering”?

A face covering is anything that covers your nose and mouth, including dust masks, scarves and bandanas. Please do not use health care masks such as the N95 masks - those are made for health care workers and should be preserved for their use.

It is important that you wear a face covering or mask in situations where it is difficult to maintain a social distance of six feet from others. This includes, for example, in a pharmacy, grocery store or on public transportation.

#### What is the best way to use a cloth face covering or a mask?

Face coverings should:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

Face coverings should **not** be placed on young children under age 2. For children between the ages of 2 and 5, it is up to the child’s parents or guardians to decide if the child should wear one. Face coverings should not be placed on anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. In addition, individuals who lip read as part of their method of communication do not need to wear face coverings or masks.

When putting on and taking off a mask, do not touch the front of it you should only handle the ties or ear straps. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after touching the mask.

**Where can I get a face covering or mask?**

Masks are available for purchase in stores and online. Face Covering Do's and Don'ts and instructions on how to make your own cloth mask are available on the [CDC web site](#).

**Do face coverings or masks need to be cleaned? If so, how do you do that and how often?**

Cloth face coverings should be washed and dried without damage or change to shape. When putting on and taking off a mask, it is important to not touch the front of it and handle the ties or ear straps. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after touching the mask.

**Do children need to wear face coverings or masks?**

Children under the age of 2 should **not** wear face coverings or masks. Face covering use by children 2 years of age and up to the age of 5 are encouraged but should be at the discretion of the child's parent or guardian at this time. Parents and guardians should ensure that the mask fits snugly and does not obstruct a child's ability to breathe.

**What about for people with medical conditions who are not required to wear face coverings?**

People who have medical conditions that put them in high-risk groups are advised to stay home as much as possible and avoid situations where they could be exposed to COVID-19.

**Who is exempted from wearing a face covering?**

Exceptions for wearing face masks include situations that may inhibit an individual from wearing a face-mask safely. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Those who cannot breathe safely;
- Those who, due to a behavioral health diagnosis, are unable to do so;
- Those communicating with people who rely on lip-reading;
- Those who require supplemental oxygen to breathe; and
- Those who are exercising outdoors and are able to keep physical distance from others.

**How does Massachusetts define a medical condition? Must individuals provide proof?**

Medical conditions that prevent use of face coverings include difficulty breathing because of lung and respiratory conditions, conditions that require supplemental oxygen, and behavioral health diagnoses that make someone unable to wear a mask. You are not required to provide proof of your condition.

**What is the scientific evidence that supports wearing face coverings or a mask?**

Because so many people who have COVID-19 show no symptoms, wearing cloth face coverings reduces the chance of transmitting the virus. This is especially true when someone with COVID-19 comes within 6 feet of you, which is considered "close contact," the range that increases transmitting infection through acts like sneezing or coughing.

Face coverings help reduce the amount of droplets that you emit when you are speaking, breathing, or exhaling. Reducing the number of droplets reduces the chance that you will spread the virus that causes infections.

Face coverings don't replace social distancing, but they do help. That is why it's important to stay more than 6 feet away from others.

### **Guidance on where face coverings are required**

#### **In what kinds of places are face coverings or masks required?**

Masks or cloth face coverings are always required when you can't socially distance, for example:

- Inside or waiting in line outside of grocery stores, pharmacies, and other retail stores;
- Providing or using the services of any taxi, car, livery, ride-sharing, or similar service;
- On any form of public transit, including train or bus; and
- In an enclosed or semi-enclosed transit stop or waiting area.

#### **Which businesses does this order apply to?**

This order applies to all workers and customers of businesses and other organizations that are currently open to the public and permitted to operate, such as grocery stores, pharmacies and other retail stores.

#### **Are face coverings or masks required on public transit?**

Yes. Residents are required to wear a mask or face covering at all times when using any means of transportation service or public mass transit. This includes in an enclosed or semi-enclosed transit stop or waiting area.

#### **Is there a penalty for not complying?**

The Department of Public Health and local boards of health are authorized to enforce the face covering order and, if necessary, with the assistance of State or municipal police. Violation may result in a civil fine of up to \$300 per violation.

#### **Can a business (such as a grocery store) refuse entry to people without a face covering?**

Yes. A business may refuse entry to a person who refuses to cover their face, unless it is for medical reasons.

#### **Do you need to wear a face covering if you are outside for a walk? What about when you are running, biking, or doing other types of cardio activity?**

You must wear a mask or face covering in public places where you cannot socially distance from others.

#### **What about people living in apartment buildings? For example, must a person wear face coverings if they are going to lobby to get their mail?**

While you are not required to cover your face while in your apartment, you should wear a mask or face covering in common areas where you cannot socially distance from others.

**Is there guidance for polling places?**

All persons are encouraged to cover their mouth and nose with a mask or cloth face-covering while inside a polling place, even where they are able to maintain a distance of approximately six feet from every other person. All polling places should be set up to maintain social distancing during the voting process.

However, whether wearing a face-covering/mask or not, all qualified voters will be allowed to vote without consequence.

Given there is more physical contact with high-touch areas at polling places, hand hygiene, including widespread hand sanitizer use, is particularly important.