

Public Health Guidance on Personal Protective Equipment during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide Public Health guidance on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most workers will not require PPE for protection against the COVID-19 virus, however, some occupations that require workers to come into close contact (less than two metres) with people known to have or suspected of having COVID-19 will need to take extra precautions.

According to the [Hierarchy of Controls](#), PPE is just one aspect in the protection of employees. If an employer provides personal protective equipment (PPE), employees must be trained on the safe use, storage, care and limitations of PPE, including [putting on and taking off PPE](#) as well as proper disposal.

When are non-medical masks recommended?

In situations where physical distancing is not possible, such as on public transit or in small grocery stores, it is recommended that people wear a non-medical mask/face covering. This is an additional measure that can be used to protect others and is not a substitute for physical distancing, handwashing, coughing and sneezing into a tissue or sleeve and staying home if feeling ill. Wearing a non-medical mask that covers the mouth and nose can prevent the wearer's respiratory droplets from contaminating others or landing on surfaces, but will not protect them from getting COVID-19 from others.

Workers and employers may also consider requiring non-medical masks/face coverings in addition to mandatory occupational health and safety measures.

Detailed information about face coverings/non-medical masks can be found:

[Ontario.ca – Face coverings and face masks](#)

[Canada.ca - Non-medical masks and face coverings](#)

[Do's and don'ts of wearing a face mask infographic](#)

When are medical masks, or N95 masks recommended?

Medical masks, such as surgical and N95 masks, should be reserved for use by health care workers, those providing direct care, and first responders.

If workers are actively screening the public at their workplace, [IPAC recommendations for use of personal protective equipment](#) should be followed. Surgical/procedure masks would only be

necessary for screeners if they are unable to maintain a distance of at least two metres or are not separated by physical barrier from the public (e.g., Plexiglas). Additionally, an isolation gown, gloves, and eye protection (goggles or face shield) are recommended for these screeners.

For protection against COVID-19, N95 masks are only required for use by health care workers during aerosol generating medical procedures and when otherwise determined by a regulated health profession.

When is the use of gloves recommended?

Gloves are not a substitute for good hand hygiene and wearing rubber gloves while in the community does **NOT** reduce the risk of COVID-19. In fact, regular handwashing with soap and water and not touching your face offers more protection.

If you wear gloves, you can still be exposed to COVID-19 if you touch your face with the dirty gloves, or don't wash your hands after removing dirty gloves. Unless providing direct care to someone infected with COVID-19, the use of gloves for the general public is not recommended.

When is a face shield or other eye protection recommended?

The use of face shields and/or other eye protection is recommended:

- in settings such as health care and long-term care facilities, for workers caring for and entering rooms of individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19; and
- for workers involved in active screening of the public

When is other PPE recommended?

The Government of Ontario's [guidance for specific workplace sectors](#) outlines the steps workplaces must take to protect employees and customers. This may include PPE, especially in situations where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Where can PPE suppliers be found?

The [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](#) has an up-to-date list of Ontario companies and business associations that are ready to supply personal protective equipment.

Where can more information be found?

Businesses with questions about the reopening of certain workplaces and the necessary public health and safety measures can call the **Stop the Spread Business Information Line** at 1-888-444-3659. Help is available from Monday to Sunday, between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m.