

FAQ's- Wearing a Face Covering in Indoor Public Spaces

Updated September 11, 2020 (Revisions and new content at the bottom)

What are we being asked to do?

As of July 13, 2020 you will be required to wear a face covering in all indoor publically accessible spaces (businesses, organizations and public transit systems) in Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka.

Why are we asking people to use face covering in indoor public spaces now?

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic we asked people to stay home as much as possible to flatten the curve. This as well as the other public health measures in place, helped us to achieve that goal. Now as we continue to open the economy, see people returning to work and are able to increase our social connection we need to keep the curve flat and hang on to the gains we made while we were locked down. As we prepare for the future, which in Stage 3 will see the opening of more businesses, and the return of many services and activities, we need to add the protective measure of face coverings (along with physical distancing, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, and staying home when sick) as people are coming into contact with more people on a daily basis.

What is the evidence that supports the use of masks?

There is a growing body of scientific evidence that indicates the widespread use of face coverings by all persons decreases the spread of respiratory droplets. Public health experts also support the widespread use of face coverings to decrease transmission of COVID-19.

At this [link](#) you will find a collection of expert opinions and studies on face coverings. This list is for informational purposes only and is not representative of all articles and studies available on the subject, nor does this list cover all articles and studies that are reviewed by our staff and our Medical Officer of Health.

What is the health unit doing to make this happen?

The health unit has provided instructions to all businesses, organizations and public transit services to ensure the use of face coverings in public indoors spaces of their premises. These instructions are being issued by the Medical Officer of Health of Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) under the authority of the provincial Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA) and will continue while the provincial Emergency Orders remain in force.

What type of business or organizations are included?

All businesses, organizations and public transit are included that have **indoor public spaces** that are openly accessible to members of the public and are used for the purposes of offering goods or services to members of the public and currently include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Malls, shopping plazas and retail stores (e.g. convenience stores, grocery stores and bakeries)
- Farmers' markets (operating indoors)
- Food premises
- Personal service settings (e.g. salons, spas, tattoo parlors, etc.)
- Churches or faith settings
- Areas of mechanics' shops and garages, and repair shops open to the public
- Libraries

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- Community centres
- Public (e.g. bus or train) and private (e.g. bus, taxi, or limo) transportation services
- Organization, government and business offices (publicly accessible areas) including spaces where training is being provided to the public
- Professional offices where clients receive purchased services (e.g. lawyer's or accountant's offices) that are not open to members of the public

REVISED - What indoor public spaces are NOT included?

- Schools, licensed child care centers and indoor/outdoor day camps are exempt from the local policy. However they are not exempt from the provincial or school board level requirement (which ever applies) to wear a face covering.
- Indoor areas of a building accessible to only employees
- Areas that are outside, whether or not the areas are covered (e.g. restaurant patios)

Do employees of the business, organization or public transit service need to wear a face covering?

Yes, employees need to wear a face covering when working in the public areas of the indoor public space unless the employee is within or behind a physical barrier (e.g. plexiglass barrier) or is in an area of the premises that is not designated for public access.

What if I can't wear a face covering?

The following individuals do not have to wear a face covering in indoor public spaces:

- Children under two years of age, or children under the age of five years either chronologically or developmentally who refuse to wear a mask and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver.
- Individuals with medical conditions rendering them unable to safely wear a mask, including those with breathing difficulties or cognitive difficulties or difficulties in hearing or processing information.
- Anyone who is unable to remove the mask without help.
- Anyone wearing a face covering that would inhibit the ability to breathe in any way such as, but not limited to, during moderate to intense physical activity (such as running) or activity that would preclude its use (such as swimming).
- Individuals who cannot wear face coverings for any religious reasons.

If I am exempt from using a face covering do I have to tell the business why I am not wearing a mask?

No, if you are reminded to wear a face covering when entering a business or public transit you can simply respond that you are exempt from this policy. You do not need to give any details.

What kind of face covering can I wear?

A face covering means a non-medical mask, or other face coverings such as a bandana, scarf, or cloth mask that has been purchased or made, that covers the mouth, nose and chin ensuring a barrier that limits the spread of respiratory droplets when you cough, sneeze or talk.

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Is a t-shirt cloth mask, bandana, buff or scarf, really helpful?

Yes, recent research has found that using household textiles such as a cotton t-shirt does reduce the amount of respiratory droplets that are spread into the environment. In fact, if you use a two-layer household textile as a face covering this can be just as efficient as using a medical mask. (Source: Rodriguez-Palacios A, Cominelli F, Basson AR, Pizarro TT, Ilic S. Textile masks and surface covers-a spray simulation method and a "Universal Droplet Reduction Model" against respiratory pandemics Front Med (Lausanne). 2020 May 27; 7:260.)

Can I wear a face shield instead of a face covering?

Face shields do not replace face coverings or masks. Your nose, mouth, and chin must be covered. Face shields protect the wearer from respiratory droplets but do not protect those around them, and must be worn with a mask.

Do I still need to practice physical distancing (stay 2 metres apart) if we are all wearing face coverings?

Yes. All public health measure must still be maintained and promoted including [washing your hands](#) often with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer, sneezing and coughing into your sleeve, staying home if you are ill and practising physical distancing to reduce exposure to other people — this means staying at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from anyone outside your household or social circle.

Can I remove my face covering if physical distancing is not a concern in the indoor public space?

No. However, you are allowed to temporarily remove your face covering where necessary for the purpose of:

- receiving services (including eating or drinking when dine-in services are allowed) or
- while actively engaging in an athletic or fitness activity including water-based activities.

Ensure you wash your hands using soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after removing your mask or face covering.

How do I properly wear a face covering?

- Wash your hands immediately before putting it on and immediately after taking it off (practise good hand hygiene while you are wearing the face covering).
- Make sure the face covering fits well around your nose and mouth.
- Avoid moving the mask around or adjusting it often.
- Avoid touching the covering while using it.
- Do not share it with others.
- Face coverings should be changed when they get slightly wet or dirty

[Video: how to wear your non-medical mask properly](#)
How to make a cloth mask [sew and no-sew instructions](#)

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How do you clean and dispose of a face covering?

When removing a face covering, you should:

- throw disposable face coverings into a lined garbage bin
- wash your hands
- do not leave any discarded face coverings in shopping carts or on the ground
- reusable face coverings must be cleaned frequently.

If your face covering is damp or soiled you should:

- put it directly into the washing machine or a bag that can be emptied into the washing machine
- wash with other items using a hot cycle with laundry detergent (no special soaps are needed), and dry thoroughly
- wash your hands after putting the face covering into the laundry
- all face coverings that cannot be cleaned should be thrown out and replaced as soon as they get damp, soiled or crumpled.

There are no garbage bins outside of the stores, what do I do with my disposable mask?

Please don't throw your mask on the ground or leave in the store for someone else to clean up. Face coverings that haven't been properly disposed of can cause the coronavirus to spread more easily. If there is no garbage bin outside the store, bring it with you, or ask before check out for an extra grocery bag and carefully put your disposable mask in so you can carry it home to throw away.

Is it safe to wear a face covering in the heat?

Wearing a mask is important to decrease the transmission of COVID-19 in any indoor setting where it may be difficult to maintain at least a two metre or six feet distance. Wearing a mask outdoors is necessary in situations when proper physical distancing cannot be maintained. Although wearing a mask may become more uncomfortable in hot temperatures, it will still work. You may need to change your mask more frequently in hot and humid temperatures as it may become damp more quickly. If you find wearing a face mask uncomfortable in the heat, plan outdoor activities for the coolest times of the day and take breaks in the shade or cool environment. For outdoor workers undertaking physical exertion in heat, a mask can make the effort more difficult. Decreasing intensity and volume of work, taking more frequent rests and taking more cooling breaks may be necessary. Discuss with your employer.

How can you prevent glasses from fogging up when wearing a face covering?

1. Always wash your hands with soap and water first.
Remember, scrub for 20 seconds (two rounds of "Happy Birthday") before you rinse.

2. Wet your glasses, then lather some soap on the lenses.
There's no time limit for lens scrubbing, so be gentle and thorough.

3. Rinse your glasses under warm water.
Don't leave any soap suds on your lenses.

4. Gently dry your glasses with a clean towel or lens cloth.
Avoid using a towel that may scratch your delicate lenses.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/lifestyle/how-to-stop-your-glasses-from-fogging-up-when-you-wear-a-mask-1.4929263>

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What religions are exempt from wearing a face covering in public indoor spaces?

The religious exemption for wearing a face covering is in place to respect different religious beliefs that have teachings or practices around covering the face. If someone claims an exemption that is enough for the business owner to permit it and they are not to ask under what exemption the person is claiming, religious or otherwise. We encourage business owners to use "good faith" and education to remind people to wear a face covering.

Can a customer be refused entry if they are not wearing a face covering?

Although businesses, organizations or public transit services have the right to deny entry to their premise, we are asking the policy regarding the use of face coverings indoors be enacted in "good faith" and be used as a means to educate people on face covering use. Best effort standard means that businesses ensure customers are reminded that they should wear a mask and continue wearing a mask in indoor public spaces. There is no need for a business to turn away customers to achieve the best effort standard. In order to not stigmatize people who cannot use face coverings, consider providing and promoting alternate ways of providing your products/services for them.

Who is responsible for enforcing this requirement and is there a penalty for non-compliance?

- Under the EMCPA enforcement of these requirements may be conducted by police officers as well as provincial offences officers (which includes municipal bylaw officers and public health enforcement personnel).
- SMDHU's focus is on raising public awareness and educating people on the use of non-medical masks or face coverings in premises where physical distancing may be difficult. Businesses, organizations and public transit services can achieve the best effort standard by ensuring customers/clients are reminded to wear a mask and keep it on while in their premise (excluding reasons for removing it e.g. eating). Individuals, businesses or organizations who do not comply with the requirements may be fined as per the EMCPA. It is important to know that while we will commence with an educational and supportive approach, as per the EMCPA, those who do not comply with the above noted requirements may be fined. Individuals may be liable for a fine of \$750-\$1,000 up to a maximum of \$100,000, while corporations may be liable for a fine of up to \$10,000,000 for each day or part of each day on which the offence occurs or continues.

Are religious officiants exempt from wearing a mask when leading a religious service/ceremony?

Face coverings must be worn by everyone inside the place of worship at all times unless it is reasonably required to temporarily remove the face covering for services provided by the religious officiant or other designated member. A faith leader or designated member who is speaking during a religious service/ceremony may remove their mask for the purposes of public speaking where sufficient distance (at least 4 metres) is provided between the speaker(s) and participants. In the event the faith leader or designated member is speaking loudly or singing, masks may be removed if there is a sufficient barrier (e.g. plexiglass) between the speaker(s)/singers(s) and others. If a microphone is being used during speaking or singing, it must be sanitized between users.

Is a mask required to be worn by a speaker during public speaking engagements? (E.g. preaching/speaking at a place of worship or faith-based organization, public presentations, council meetings, etc.)

Face coverings must be worn by everyone inside the business or organization at all times, unless it is reasonably required to temporarily remove the face covering for services provided by the business or organization (such as eating/drinking, speaking or

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singing). Where speaking or singing is required as a part of the activity (e.g. wedding, religious service, government council meetings, public presentations), masks may be removed for the purposes of speaking where sufficient distance (at least 4 metres) is provided between the speaker(s) and participants. For loud speaking or singing, masks may only be removed if there is a sufficient barrier (e.g. plexiglass) between the speaker(s)/singers(s) and others. If a microphone is being used during speaking or singing, it must be sanitized between users.

Are singers (e.g. choir members) and other performers (e.g. musicians, actors) required to have face coverings during rehearsals and performances?

Singers or performers do not need to wear a mask while they are rehearsing or performing, but must be separated from any spectators by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier. Every performer and other person who provides work for the business or place must maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person, except, if it is necessary for the performers to be closer to each other for the purposes of the performance or rehearsal. During periods of rest in between performances, face coverings should be used.

When can I take my face covering off at a restaurant and what should I do with it while it is off?

Wear a face covering into the restaurant, while ordering and until your food comes to your table. Your face covering can stay off while you are eating and drinking. Once your food arrives take off your face covering without touching the outside of it and store it in a bag specifically for storing your face covering (don't put it directly into your purse) or place face down between paper towels or layers of a napkin. Do not pull your face covering down and wear it on your chin or neck. Make sure to sanitize your hands after removing your face covering before you eat. You do not need to put it back on between bites or sips, as taking your face covering on and off between bites of food might actually increase the risk of spreading the virus from your mask to your hand. Once you are done eating, sanitize your hands before you put your face covering back on. Another option is to bring an additional clean face covering with you and put this one on after you are done eating. If you are planning to eat with people outside of your social circle, consider taking your food to go and enjoying it while being 2 metres apart.

Does the indoor limit of 50 people apply to all restaurants?

No. The indoor limit of 50 people doesn't apply to restaurants. Indoor capacity is based on space and ability to maintaining minimum 2 metres between patrons (so could be more or less than 50 depending on the size of the restaurant).

When do face coverings need to be used at weddings?

While indoor gatherings of up to 50 people and outdoor gatherings up to 100 people are allowed in Stage 3 for weddings, actual allowed numbers are based on location of the ceremony or reception. In any location, physical distancing of at least 2 metres is still required for everyone in attendance unless they are from the same household or established social circle. In addition to physical distancing requirements, masking requirements also apply to all people attending indoor ceremonies and receptions (see table below).

Face coverings may be removed by the officiant for the purposes of speaking where sufficient distance (at least 4 metres) can be maintained between the speaker(s) and guests. Microphones can be used but sanitized between users. Loud speaking or singing can occur without a mask if a barrier (e.g. plexiglass) is in place between the speaker/singer and all other guests.

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If photos are being taken at the event the photographer must maintain physical distance of at least 2 metres from those being photographed and wear a face covering if the photos are indoors. Anyone in the photos can be closer than 2 metres without masks if they are outdoors and in the same social bubble. When indoors, or when outdoors but close to people outside of your social circle, all people in the photo need to wear a face covering.

Location	Private Dwellings		Public Spaces	
	Ceremony	Reception	Ceremony (e.g. place of worship, banquet hall)	Reception (e.g. banquet hall)
Indoor	50 person max*	50 person max*	30% capacity of facility*	50 person max for the entire facility*
Outdoor	100 person max*	100 person max*	100 person max*	100 person max*

* All persons shall comply with public health guidance on physical distancing

In the event that severe weather occurs during a larger outdoor gathering can the attendees go inside for shelter?

Yes, safety first, but the event cannot carry on indoors. Everyone who can wear a mask should do so indoors and as much as possible physically distance at least 2 metres from others who are not in their social circle until it is safe to go outside after the storm passes.

Revised - Should I wear a face covering in common areas of multi-dwelling buildings (e.g. condos)?

Yes. While such buildings are typically restricted to the public without approved entry, the general public can enter common spaces when going to a residence/room within the location. As a result, face coverings are highly recommended in common areas (e.g. elevators, reception areas) of private and secured residential buildings as these spaces may not permit physical distancing to take place.

For more information or if you have questions about wearing face coverings or masks in any indoor public space, call SMDHU Health Connection at 1-877-721-7520.