

FAQs- WEARING MASKS OR FACE COVERINGS WITHIN ENCLOSED PUBLIC SPACES – STEP 3

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Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is currently at Step 3 of the province's [Roadmap to Reopen](#). This document provides guidance and clarity for wearing masks or face coverings at Step 3 by following [Ontario Regulation 364/20: Rules for Areas at Step 3](#) (O. Reg 364/20) under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#).

What are we being asked to do?

The Province of Ontario requires the use of masks or [face coverings](#) as a means of source control in the indoor premises of all businesses, public settings, organizations and their vehicles, with some exceptions. This means when persons enters into a public indoor space or workplace (even those not open to the public); common areas of apartment buildings, condominium buildings, and student residences; or if persons use public transit (e.g. bus, taxis or rideshare), they are required to wear a mask or face covering. Some outdoor environments and activities also require a mask to be worn.

More information can be found in the amended [Reopening Ontario Act, 2020 \(ROA\)](#) and associated regulations, as well as the [instructions](#) issued by SMDHU's medical officer of health (MOH). The instructions issued by the SMDHU's MOH require public health measures to be taken in addition to those in the ROA and associated regulations. They are specifically intended for businesses and workplaces. Where there is overlap, the amended [Reopening Ontario Act, 2020](#), and associated regulations will be applied first.

Under what authority were the SMDHU instructions issued?

The instructions were issued by the medical officer of health of the SMDHU under the authority of the ROA and/or its associated regulations, as amended. These instructions are in addition to the mask/face covering requirements found within the ROA.

How long must people comply with these instructions?

Masks or [face coverings](#) are required indoors until further notice in all businesses, organizations, their vehicles and public transit services in Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka. These instructions are further supported in the requirements of the ROA and/or its regulations as amended for the wearing of masks or face coverings in indoor premises of businesses or organizations or in vehicles operating as part of the business or organization. When driving alone in a vehicle, a mask or face covering is typically not required.

What type of business or organizations are included?

All businesses, organizations and public transit that have indoor spaces openly accessible to members of the public and/or are used to offer goods or services to members of the public are included. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Places where goods and services are sold:
 - retail stores, shopping malls, food courts, shopping plazas (e.g. convenience stores, grocery stores and bakeries),
 - indoor farmers' markets and flea markets,
 - gas stations,
 - mechanic shops, garages and repair shops,
 - personal service settings (e.g. salons, spas, tattoo parlours, etc.),
 - showrooms, and
 - open houses, presentation centres or facilities for real estate purposes.
- Churches, mosques, synagogues, temples or other faith based organizations
- Municipal facilities (e.g. libraries, community centres)
- Indoor attractions, including art galleries, museums, zoos, paintball, bowling, indoor play spaces and other similar facilities
- Event spaces (banquet halls, community halls, arenas, auditoriums, and other similar facilities)

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- Common areas of commercial buildings, hotels, motels, and other short-term rentals, such as lobbies, elevators, meeting rooms or other shared use facilities.
- Indoor entertainment facilities and venues, including concert venues, theatres, casinos, bingo halls and other similar facilities.
- Athletic facilities, including gyms, fitness centres, studios, and sports and recreational centres, and other similar facilities (masks do not need to be worn when engaging in physical activity but physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) must be maintained, and masks are required in common areas).
- Public and private transportation services such as buses, trains, taxis, shuttles, limousine services, and other similar ride-share programs.
- Organization, government, and business offices (publicly accessible areas), including spaces where training is being provided to the public.

For a list of exceptions to the mask or face coverings requirement, please refer to the [province's website](#) or section 2(4) under Schedule 1 (General compliance) of [O. Reg 364/20](#).

What are some examples of how businesses, organizations and public transit services can enact the instructions?

- Post appropriate visible signage indicating that masks or face coverings are required inside the establishment. Public signage is available on our [website](#) to download and print.
- When a person who is not wearing a mask or face covering enters the premise or is seen removing their mask or face covering for extended periods of time, a verbal reminder should be given of the requirement to keep on their mask or face covering.
- In situations where someone may require an employee to remove their mask or face covering to speak to them (e.g., for a specific communication need like lip reading), we remind anyone removing their mask or face covering to follow safe handling procedures and to keep a distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from others. *Note:* the customer entering the premises may have an exemption and cannot wear a mask or face covering. It is recommended that the customer be reminded of the policy instead of being turned away. All exemptions should be enacted and enforced in "good faith" and should be used to educate people on the use of masks or face coverings. The business, organization or public transit service should continue to follow physical distancing and hand hygiene protocols.

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

Yes, employees need to wear a mask or face covering when working in the public areas of the indoor public space as described in the letter of [instruction](#) from SMDHU's medical officer of health.

What kind of mask or face covering can customers or employees wear?

- Customers or employers must wear masks or face coverings that covers the mouth, nose, and chin, ensuring a barrier that limits the spread of respiratory droplets when you cough, sneeze, or talk.
- Face coverings or masks should:
 - be made of at least two layers of tightly woven material (such as cotton or linen),
 - [be well-fitted](#) and large enough to completely and comfortably cover the nose, mouth, and chin without gaping,
 - fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops, and
 - maintain their shape after washing and drying.
- Do not use plastic or other non-breathable materials as a mask or face covering.
- Face shields, neck gaiters, scarves and bandanas are not recommended masks or face coverings.
- For more information about masks or face coverings, visit the [Province of Ontario's](#) website.

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What added protections are required to protect employees?

- Ensure all employees are aware of the policy and are trained on your establishment's expectations.
- For the indoor area of the premise accessible to members of the public, ensure each worker wears a mask or face covering that forms a barrier with the skin in a manner that covers their mouth, nose, and chin, and as best as possible, maintains a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person while in the indoor area.
- If an employee will be within 2 metres (6 feet) of another employee or customer, while indoors, ensure the employee wears appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). At a minimum, a medical mask and eye protection should be worn by employees if physical distancing cannot be maintained or interactions within 2 metres (6 feet) are unpredictable in circumstances where the other person is not wearing a mask or face covering in a manner that covers that person's mouth, nose, and chin.
- Masks or face coverings must be worn if physical distancing cannot be maintained outdoors.

What is considered adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for COVID-19?

- Personal protective equipment (PPE) is used alone or in combination to prevent exposure to COVID-19 and places a barrier between the infectious source (e.g. someone else's cough) and a person's own mucous membranes, airways, skin and clothing.
- The selection of PPE is based on the nature of the interaction with the client/customer and the known modes of COVID-19 transmission.
- At a minimum in businesses & workplaces, PPE for COVID-19 prevention would include a medical mask and eye protection. A face shield is not a replacement for a medical mask. Those providing direct care (e.g., helping with bathing, feeding, diapering) may require additional PPE.
- Provincial PPE supply information is available [here](#).

Are 3-layer non-medical masks better than 2-layer masks?

- When seeking a new non-medical mask, a homemade or purchased 3-layer non-medical mask is recommended.
- Existing 2-layer masks do not need to be discarded and can continue to be used if they are in good condition and fit properly. All masks should be tightly fitted to cover the nose, mouth, and chin.
- 3-layer non-medical masks with a disposable or reusable filter-type layer may offer greater filtration compared to a 2-layer non-medical mask with no filter and are currently also recommended by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) and World Health Organization.

Where does a mask or face covering need to be worn in multi-unit housing buildings?

Such buildings are typically restricted to the public without approved entry. Masks or face coverings are required in common areas (e.g., elevators, reception areas) of private and secured residential buildings, including apartment buildings, condominiums and student residences in which persons are unable to maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from other persons.

Who is exempt from wearing a mask or face covering?

Some people may not be able to wear a mask or face covering. It is best not to be judgmental of persons and to not make assumptions about those you see without masks or face coverings.

For a list of exceptions to the mask/face covering requirement, please refer to the province's website or section 2(4) under Schedule 1 (General compliance) of [O. Reg 364/20](#).

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

- Although businesses, organizations or public transit services have the right to deny entry to their premises, the SMDHU is asking the policy regarding the use of masks and face coverings indoors be enacted in “good faith” and be used to educate people on mask or face covering use.
- Best effort standard means that businesses ensure customers are reminded that they should wear a mask or face covering at all times when in indoor public spaces. There is no need for a business to turn away customers to achieve the best effort standard; however, they can turn someone away if they choose to.
- To not stigmatize people who cannot use masks or face coverings, consider providing and promoting alternative ways of providing your products/services for them.

Can businesses require proof of exemption?

No, a person does not have to show proof of their exemption. There is no need for an exemption card or a letter from a physician.

Is my business required to provide masks or face coverings for customers who may not have one?

No, it is not required that you provide free masks or face coverings for your customers.

Does a person still need to stay 2 metres (6 feet) away from others if they are wearing a mask or face covering?

Yes. All public health measures must still be maintained and promoted, including: maintaining a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from people outside your household; washing your hands often with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60-90% alcohol content, and sneezing and coughing into your sleeve. If a person has COVID-19 [symptoms](#), they should stay home, seek testing and [self-isolate](#) to reduce exposure to other people.

When can a customer or employee remove their mask or face covering?

A customer can temporarily remove their mask/face covering where necessary for the purposes of:

- receiving services that require the removal of their mask or face covering (if services are permitted),
- engaging in an athletic or fitness activity,
- consuming food or drink, or
- health and safety.

Employees may remove their mask or face covering when stationary in a physically distanced staff-only area where the public does not have access. If staff are moving around in a staff-only area they should still wear a face covering, even if physically distancing.

Does this policy apply to staff providing lifesaving functions?

No, it does not apply to emergencies or other situations where putting on a mask or face covering would jeopardize the safety of a person or the public.

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

- Under the ROA, enforcement of these requirements may be conducted by police officers as well as provincial offences officers (which includes municipal law enforcement officers and public health enforcement personnel).

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- People, businesses, or organizations who do not comply with the mask and face covering requirements may be fined as well as non-compliant patrons.
- Persons 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 or face covering when leading a religious service/ceremony?

Masks or face coverings must be worn by everyone inside the place of worship at all times unless it is reasonably required to temporarily remove the mask or face covering for services provided by the religious officiant or other designated member. Please refer to the [faith based organizations](#) guidance document for more details.

Is a mask or face covering required to be worn by a speaker during public speaking engagements?

- Everyone must wear masks or face coverings inside the business or organization at all times unless it is reasonably required to temporarily remove the mask or face covering for services provided by the business or organization (such as speaking or singing).
- For loud speaking or singing, masks or face coverings may only be removed if there is a sufficient barrier (e.g. Plexiglas) or at least 2 metres (6 feet) physical distance between the speaker(s)/singer(s) and others. If a microphone is being used during speaking or singing, it must be disinfected between users.

Are singers and other performers required to wear masks or face coverings during rehearsals and performances for film or television production, concert, artistic event, theatrical performance, or other performance?

- The following guidance applies for premises where singers and other performances are permitted for film or television production or in a concert, artistic event, theatrical performance, or other performance:
 - singers or performers (e.g., musicians, actors) do not need to wear a mask or face covering while they are rehearsing or performing in a film or television production or in a concert, artistic event, theatrical performance or other performance,
 - during periods of rest in between performances, masks or face coverings should be used.

When do masks or face coverings need to be used at weddings?

- In any location, physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) is still required for everyone in attendance unless they are from the same household.
- The couple may remove their masks during the wedding ceremony.
- In addition to physical distancing requirements, mask or face covering requirements also apply to all people attending indoor ceremonies and receptions ([see SMDHU's guidance for indoor and outdoor events and gatherings](#)).

If photos are being taken at the event, the photographer must maintain physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from those being photographed and wear a mask or face covering if the photos are indoors, or if they are unable to maintain physical distancing while outdoors. If photographs are indoor, the total number of patrons permitted inside at the studio or place of services must be limited to the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from every other person in the establishment. The capacity limit for the space must be posted (sample signage is available on our [website](#)) and persons entering the location are actively screened.

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SUPPORTING EACH OTHER AND OUR COMMUNITY

We understand that this is a challenging time, but public health measures like this are needed to limit the spread of COVID-19. We thank you for the service that you provide to the community.

Please contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's Health Connection line if you have any questions at 1-877-721-7520, Monday to Saturday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

While the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit aims to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to, nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional. No one should act, or refrain from acting, based solely upon the materials provided in this guidance, any hypertext links or other general information without first seeking appropriate legal or other professional advice. Please visit the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit website regularly for updates and additional guidance.