

FAQ's- What Businesses Need to Know

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

What are we being asked to do?

As of July 13, 2020 all owners and operators of businesses, organizations and public transit services currently operating under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA) are required to have a policy in place to restrict people from entering indoor publicly accessible areas of the business/ organization or public/private transit vehicle if they are not wearing a face covering.

These [instructions](#) reinforce the requirements that all persons responsible for a business or organization permitted to open per the EMCPA (or current) shall operate the business or organization in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials.

Under what authority are these instructions being issued?

These instructions are being issued by Medical Officer of Health of Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) under the authority of the provincial Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA).

What evidence supports the instructions?

There is a growing body of scientific evidence 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.

When are these instructions in effect? How long must people comply with these instructions?

Instructions for mandatory face covering use in all indoor public spaces are in effect as of 12:01 a.m. Monday, July 13, 2020. Face coverings will be required indoors in all businesses, organizations and public transit services in Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka currently operating under the EMCPA 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 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 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 parlours, 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 (elementary, secondary and post-secondary), 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)

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

- Post appropriate visible signage indicating that face coverings are required inside the establishment. Public signage is available on our [website](#) to download and print.
- Where a person not wearing a face covering enters the premise, a verbal reminder should be given to the customer to wear a face covering. Note: the customer entering the premises may have an exemption and is unable to wear a mask. Instead of turning away the customer please remind the customer of the policy. All exemptions should be enacted and enforced in "good faith" and should be used as a means to educate people on the use of face coverings. The business, organization or public transit service should continue to follow the physical distancing and hand hygiene protocols.
- For customers in the store seen removing their face covering for extended periods of time, a verbal reminder should be given to the customer of the requirement to keep on their face covering.
- There may be situations where someone may require an employee to remove their face covering to speak to them (e.g. for a specific communication need like lip reading). We remind anyone removing their face covering to follow safe handling procedures and to keep a distance of 2 metres (6 feet) away from others.
- Training: Ensure that all employees are aware of the policy and are trained on your establishment's expectations.

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 kind of face covering can customers or employees 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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Can my employees or customers wear a face shield instead of a face covering?

No. Face shields do not replace face coverings or masks. The 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.

Who is exempt from wearing 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 breathing difficulties or cognitive difficulties or difficulties in hearing or processing information.
- Anyone who has trouble breathing.
- Anyone who is unable to remove the mask without help.
- Anyone who is unconscious or incapacitated.
- 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).
- For any religious reasons.

Can businesses require proof of exemption?

No, you cannot ask for proof of exemption.

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

No, it is not required that you provide free face coverings for your customers. A face covering can be made at home or by using a bandana, or scarf and therefore most people would have access to a face covering.

Do I need to use the signs you have provided on your website, I don't have a printer in my business?

We only ask that you post appropriate visible signage indicating that face coverings are required inside the business or organization. Sample signage can be found on the COVID-19 workplace section of the SMDHU website [here](#).

Does a person still need to stay 2 metres away from others if they are wearing a face covering?

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.

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Can a customer or employee remove their face covering if physical distancing is not a concern in the establishment or enclosed public space?

A customer is allowed to temporarily remove their 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.

An employee can remove their face covering when in a staff-only area where the public does not have access or when they are behind a physical barrier (e.g. Plexiglas barrier).

Does my business/organization need to enforce this policy if we offer courses for the public (e.g. first aid, ESL)?

Yes. If the courses are offered in person and indoors then wearing a face covering is required.

Does this policy apply to staff providing lifesaving functions?

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

Would a place that runs retreats have to wear mandatory face coverings?

Yes. The place is still providing a service to the public and it is an indoor public space. Both the public and staff who interact with members of the public, would be required to wear a face covering. There are still exemptions that may be applicable as well as times when the face covering can be temporarily removed. If a face covering is not being worn other precautions such as physical distancing, hand hygiene and cough etiquette are required.

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.

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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 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.

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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.

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

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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.