

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Universal Masking

Universal Masking for Priority Populations

June 3, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly, and this guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Southwestern Public Health website www.swpublichealth.ca regularly for updates and additional information.

Universal Masking

- The best way to stop the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus) is by staying home, avoiding close contact with others outside of your household, washing your hands, and practicing respiratory etiquette (sneezing and coughing into your sleeve).
- Universal masking is an additional way to reduce the rate of COVID-19 transmission.
- Face coverings or non-medical masks like cloth masks are recommended for use in public settings when physical distancing is not possible.
- Non-medical masks are used to protect others from exposure to the wearer's respiratory aerosols/droplets. It may also prevent other people's respiratory droplets from landing on your mouth or nose.
- Medical masks (surgical, medical procedure face masks and respirators like N95 masks) should be reserved for use by health care workers and first responders.

How to Properly Use Non-Medical Masks

- Non-medical masks should completely and comfortably cover the nose and mouth and fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops. Masks should be made of at least two layers of tightly woven material (like cotton or linen) and maintain their shape after washing and drying.
- Be sure to [put on and take off masks safely and properly](#).
- Clean or dispose of non-medical masks properly. See below for cleaning and washing information.
- Display this [poster](#) on the do's and don'ts of non-medical masks for clients and the public.

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Washing and Drying Non-Medical Masks

- Be sure to clean and wash non-medical masks properly.
- Once damp, soiled or damaged, remove the mask. If the mask is disposable, place directly into the garbage. If reusable, place used mask in a sealed bag, wash your hands.
- Washing Machine:
 - The mask can be brought home and placed directly in the wash, discarding the bag the mask is in into the garbage.
 - Do not leave used mask on counters or on the ground.
 - You can include your mask with your regular laundry.
 - Use regular laundry detergent and wash in hot water.
- Washing by Hand:
 - Prepare a bleach solution by mixing 4 teaspoons of household bleach per litre of room temperature water.
 - Never mix household bleach with other cleaners.
 - Soak the mask in the bleach solution for 5 minutes.
 - Rinse thoroughly with cool or room temperature water.
- Dryer:
 - Use the highest heat setting and leave it in the dryer until completely dry.
- Air Drying:
 - Lay flat and allow to completely dry. If possible, place the mask in direct sunlight.

Considerations for Specific Populations

- Deaf: People who are deaf cannot read lips covered by an opaque mask, which also muffles sound for those who are hearing impaired. There are masks with a clear section to assist with lip reading but these are not currently approved by the Canadian Standards Association or the National Institute for Occupational Health and safety. If using one of these masks be mindful of the added plastic section that could make breathing difficult. Do not use these masks on young children.
- Asthma/COPD: Wearing masks means breathing hot and humid air, which can trigger asthma symptoms/breathing difficulties for those with lung diseases.
- Sensory/Autistic: Adults and children with Autism spectrum disorder have trouble with sensory processing, as well as tactile, olfactory, and nervous-system hypersensitivity that wearing a mask could aggravate.

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- Trauma/Mental Health: Wearing of a mask can cause anxiety because masks can be associated with negative experiences. Whether the individual can comprehend how to properly use a non-medical mask should also be considered.

Each individual needs to make their own decision on their level of comfort wearing a mask. If a mask inhibits the ability of someone to breathe in any way, it is not appropriate for that person. Please consider the other protective measures available including physical distancing, staying home when sick, washing your hands, and practicing respiratory etiquette.

Making Non-Medical Masks

- Non-medical masks and face coverings can be made a few different ways from common materials. If possible, use different fabrics for each side of the face covering, so you know which side faces your mouth and which side is out. Some homemade mask instructions also include a pocket to accommodate a paper towel or disposable coffee filter for increased benefit.
- Review these [instructions from the Government of Canada on sew and no-sew masks](#).
- Review this [guidance on creating hearing impaired-friendly masks](#).

Where to Obtain Non-Medical Masks Locally

Contact local programs who are making non-medical masks. Some local programs are listed below. Note: this is not a complete list and the list could change at any time.

Elgin County and the City of St. Thomas

- [Sewstrong COVID-19 PPE response](#)
- [Elegance Alterations by Liz](#)

Oxford County

- [Oxford County Quilty Pleasures](#)
- [Betty's Consignment Tillsonburg](#)
- [Alterations by Bree McQueen](#)
- [Oxford PPE donations](#)
- [Bijou and Birdie](#)
- [Harrington's Bag Lady](#)
- [Living Stitches Woodstock](#)
- [Red Buttons](#)

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Locations Accepting Donations

Contact these locations to inquire about donations of masks that may be available for organizations. There is no guarantee that masks will be available when you contact these locations.

- Elgin St. Thomas PPE Donations
 - Ross Street Laundry, 71 Ross Street St. Thomas- 519-207-2646
 - Monday-Friday from 9:00am-5:00pm
- Oxford PPE Donations- 1-800-755-0394 ext. 3550
 - Oxford County Paramedic Services, 377 Mill Street, Woodstock
 - Monday-Friday from 8:30am-4:30pm
 - Tillsonburg Memorial Hospital, 167 Rolph Street, Tillsonburg
 - Alexandra Hospital, 29 Noxon Street, Ingersoll

Additional Resources

- [Cleaning and disinfection in public settings](#)
- [Non-medical masks and face coverings](#)
- [How to wash your hands](#)
- [Examples of physical distancing](#)