

COVID-19 Face Coverings: Frequently Asked Questions

Face coverings are critical to stopping the spread of COVID-19. Please do your part by wearing a face covering.

What is a face covering?

A face covering is a well-secured cloth covering or disposable mask that covers your nose and mouth. When selecting a face covering, consider the following:

- Do not use a face covering with an exhalation valve as it allows unfiltered exhaled air to escape.
- Use a face covering with two or more layers of material to better prevent unfiltered air from passing through.
- Respiratory particles can exit from both your nose and mouth. Make sure the face covering fits snugly against the sides of your face and fully covers **both** your nose and mouth, without slipping.
- Do not use N95 respirators, as they remain in short supply. It is essential that we save N95 respirators for our health care workers.

Research is still underway regarding the different types of face coverings and how effective they are. More information is available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [website](#).

Who must wear a face covering?

New York State (NYS) law requires everyone over age 2 who can medically tolerate a face covering to wear one when in public if unable to maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others. Examples include walking on a busy street, shopping in stores, seeing your doctor, dining at a restaurant (when not eating or drinking), going to your place of worship or attending a gathering. You **must** wear a face covering at all times when riding public transportation, such as the subway, ferry, bus, taxis and car services. We strongly recommend you wear a face covering as much as possible when in a shared indoor space outside your home, such as places of worship and offices, even if you can maintain 6 feet of distance from others.

People who are sick should wear a face covering while at home, especially if they cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others, and at all times whenever they leave home.

What if I live in group housing with shared facilities?

If you live in a facility that has shared kitchens, bathrooms or other common spaces, wear a face covering when you leave your apartment or room.

Do children need to wear a face covering?

Children over age 2 must wear a face covering. Consider the following:

- For young children, try to find a smaller face covering or one made for children. If you cannot, shorten or adjust the face covering straps to make sure the face covering fits snugly.
- Small children are more likely to touch their face covering, so caretakers should wash children's hands or apply hand sanitizer often.

- Schools and child care programs have special requirements. Please check with your child's school or program.

What if I have a health problem that makes it hard for me to wear a face covering. Do I still need to wear one?

If you have a health problem that makes you unable to tolerate a face covering, you do not need to wear one. This makes practicing physical distancing and hand hygiene even more essential.

Do I need to wear a face covering when I am exercising?

If you are exercising outside, you do not need to wear a face covering as long as you maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others. When exercising in an indoor gym or fitness facility, you must wear a face covering at all times (unless medically unable to tolerate a face covering or under age 2). Per NYS requirements, bandanas, buffs and gaiters are **not** acceptable face coverings for use in gyms and fitness centers.

Do I need to wear a face covering while at work?

You must wear a face covering at work, unless you are certain you can maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others (including co-workers, customers, clients and visitors). Employers must provide face coverings to employees for free. Your employer may have additional requirements as to when a face covering, or other protection, is needed. Even if 6 feet of distance can be maintained, wearing a face covering as much as possible when working indoors and around other people is strongly recommended. If you cannot medically tolerate a face covering, discuss with your employer whether a reasonable accommodation is possible.

I had COVID-19 and am better now. Do I still need to wear a face covering?

Yes. The NYS requirement for wearing a face covering applies even if you had COVID-19.

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

A face shield is not an acceptable substitute for a face covering at this time. More research is needed regarding the effectiveness of face shields in stopping respiratory droplets from spreading. Face shields may be considered for use by someone who cannot medically tolerate a face covering or in addition to wearing a face covering. It should not substitute a face covering.

How often do I need to wash my face covering?

We recommend washing cloth face coverings once a day or after about eight hours of use. You can wash cloth face coverings by hand or machine using detergent and hot water. The face covering should be fully dry before using.

For how long can I use a disposable face covering?

There is no set length of time. You may be able to use the same disposable face covering for up to five days. You should discard disposable face coverings if they become damaged, dirty or wet.

Are there precautions I should take with my face covering?

Using face coverings incorrectly can spread germs. For this reason, it is important to properly wear, store and dispose of face coverings by doing the following:

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer every time you put on and take off your face covering. If you are unable to clean your hands, be very careful not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Do not put face coverings where others can touch them or where germs trapped in your face covering can touch other surfaces, such as countertops or your kitchen table.
- Do not throw your face covering loose in a bag or backpack. Keep a small bag with you to store your face covering if you will be taking it off when outside your home.
- Discard disposable face coverings in the garbage. Do not throw them on the street.
- See [How to Put On a Face Covering](#) for more information.

Is it possible to make my own face covering?

Yes. See the CDC website for [instructions](#) on making a cloth face covering.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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