

Masks Guidance During COVID-19

Summary of September 12, 2022 Changes

- Added information on different levels of protection provided by masks and respirators
- Updated to align with [CDC's masking recommendation](#) for indoor public transportation
- Updated recommendations for when masks should be worn in [non-healthcare congregate settings](#)
- Updated recommendations for when the [general public](#) should wear masks indoors, in accordance with CDC COVID-19 Community Levels

Introduction

When you wear a mask or respirator (i.e., specialized filtering masks such as N95s), you help protect others around you as well as yourself. Wearing a mask or respirator can reduce the spread of COVID-19, saving lives and keeping the economy open. Combined strategies, such as staying [up to date](#) on vaccines and wearing masks or respirators, can help prevent severe illness and lower the burden on the healthcare system.

You should wear the best-fitting and highest quality [mask or respirator](#) available to you. When worn properly, respirators [approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\)](#) (such as N95s) offer the most protection, followed by international respirators (such as KN95s and KF94s) and surgical masks, and then cloth face masks. If you are [at risk of severe COVID-19 disease](#), consult with your healthcare provider about whether you should get fit tested for a NIOSH-approved respirator or if you should consider other respirator options that do not require fit testing. For more information on fit testing and mask selection, visit [Washington State Department of Labor and Industries \(L&I\) webpage on voluntary masking](#).

For more information about different types of masks and respirators and how to improve fit, see [types of masks and respirators](#). This [webpage](#) provides some information on how well different types of masks and respirators filter out particles, including when modifications are made to masks to improve fit. People who cannot wear a mask due to developmental, behavioral, or medical conditions can use a face shield with a drape. These may also be used by children in child care, day camp, and K-12 settings if a well-fitting mask is not tolerated. **It should be acknowledged, however, these do not provide the same level of protection for the wearer as a well-fitting mask or respirator.** See the Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH) [K-12 Schools, Child Care, Early Learning, Youth Development, and Day Camp Programs](#) mask guidance. Also see CDC's [Considerations for specific groups of people](#). DOH recommends not using masks with exhalation valves or vents, single layer cloth masks, single layer bandanas, or gaiters.

Respirators with exhalation valves may be used in workplaces in accordance with guidance published by [L&I](#).

Please visit [DOH's webpage on masks](#) for a list of frequently asked mask questions.

Throughout the rest of this document, mask is used to refer to both masks and respirators.

Current Mandates and Health Orders

Current public orders require masks in [health care settings](#), adult jails, and adult prisons. Public health authorities may require masks in some situations, such as outbreaks.

Washington State Department of Health Order

The [Secretary of Health Mask Order](#) requires wearing a mask in some settings, regardless of vaccination status:

- [Health care settings](#)
- Adult prison and jail facilities when the county in which the facility is located has a medium or high [CDC COVID-19 Community Level](#)

There are limited exceptions to this requirement; these can be found in the [Order](#). All employees and visitors, in addition to the health care professionals, are required to wear a mask when indoors in [health care settings](#). Each person is responsible for complying; businesses also have responsibilities to enforce this order with employees and customers.

Rescinded: Federal Order

As of April 18, 2022, as a result of a court order, the CDC Order requiring masks on public transportation and at transportation hubs is no longer in effect. However, masks remain an important tool to keep travel and public transportation safer for everyone. [In alignment with CDC](#), WA DOH recommends workers and passengers two years of age or older wear masks in all indoor public transportation settings, including both conveyances and transportation hubs. See [Public Transportation Settings](#) for more information.

Washington State Governor Proclamation

Information on business responsibilities for customers and employees is listed in the Governor's [Proclamation 20-25.19 COVID-19 Washington Ready](#) and [Proclamation 21-08 – Safe Workers](#).

Washington State Labor and Industries (L&I) and Governor Proclamation

Although masks are not generally required in most workplaces per the Governor's Proclamation listed above, employers remain obligated to adhere to L&I [Requirements and Guidance for Preventing COVID-19](#). Additionally, private businesses can choose to require masks and visitors should respect the [rules of the room](#). Through the [Governor's Proclamation 21-08 – Safe Workers](#), workers have the right to wear a mask in a workplace. [WAC 296-62-609](#) protects a worker's right to wear a mask during a public health emergency. In accordance with [WAC 296-62-609](#), employers cannot prevent employees from wearing masks, respirators, or other personal protective devices or equipment except as narrowly permitted by law. See L&I's

[COVID-19 Prevention: Choosing to Mask Up at Work When You Are Not Required To](#) for more information.

Local Public Health Entities and Officials

Local health officials have the authority to issue health orders to control diseases within their jurisdiction. These orders may be more strict than statewide orders but cannot be any less strict. Check with your [local health jurisdiction](#) and follow all health orders in place for that area.

Recommendations

Below are general public health recommendations in addition to the specific requirements above.

Public Transportation Settings

WA DOH recommends that workers and passengers two years of age or older wear a well-fitting mask or respirator in [indoor public transportation settings](#), including conveyances (such as airplanes, buses, trains, ferries, subways, taxis, rideshares, and non-emergent medical transportation) and hubs (such as airports, bus or ferry terminals, train or subway stations, and seaports). These are settings that many people pass through, and they can be crowded and/or poorly ventilated (such as airport jetways). Travelers and workers can protect themselves and those around them by wearing a well-fitting mask or respirator to help keep travel and public transportation safer for everyone. Please see [CDC guidance on using face masks in public transportation settings](#) for details, but note that prior requirements are now recommendations. See [Requirements and Guidance to Mitigate COVID-19 Transmission in K-12 Schools, Child Care, Early Learning, Youth Development, and Day Camp Programs \(wa.gov\)](#) for mask guidance on school buses. WA DOH encourages operators of public transportation to support mask wearing by all people.

Masking in Health Care Settings

Masks must be worn in health care settings in accordance with the [Secretary of Health Mask Order](#). All health care settings can access personal protective equipment and source control guidance in [Interim Recommendations for SARS-CoV- 2 Infection Prevention and Control in Healthcare Settings, DOH 420-391 \(wa.gov\)](#).

Masking Recommendations for Non-healthcare Congregate Settings

Indoor mask use is recommended for people two years of age or older when [CDC COVID-19 Community Level](#) is medium or high in the settings below:

- [Homeless service provider sites](#)
- [Commercial maritime settings](#) (e.g., commercial seafood vessels, cargo ships, cruise ships)

- Crowded work settings where physical distancing is not possible due to the nature of the work, such as in warehouses, factories, food packaging and meat processing facilities, and employer-provided transportation
- Shared living areas of congregate living facilities (not bedrooms), including work release sites, transitional housing, juvenile rehabilitation or detention facilities, and temporary worker housing
- Indoors in settings where people incarcerated in adult prisons, adult jails, juvenile rehabilitation facilities, or juvenile detention facilities are present (e.g., court rooms)
 - Note that the Secretary of Health Order **requires** people five years of age and older to wear masks in adult prisons and jail facilities when [CDC COVID-19 Community Level](#) is medium or high.
 - Correctional facilities are recommended to also consider masking when [facility-level factors](#) indicate increased risk.

People who live or work in the above settings should follow the same recommendations as the general public when not in these settings (e.g., when out in the community).

Non-health care establishments (such as businesses and organizations) may require masking in their facilities. These establishments should consider each of the following factors when deciding whether to require masks in their setting:

- Vulnerability of people in the setting
 - People not [up to date](#) on COVID-19 vaccines are more likely to get COVID-19 and to develop severe disease.
 - People with [certain medical conditions](#) are at higher risk of severe COVID-19.
- Quality of ventilation in the setting - see [Ventilation and Air Quality for Reducing Transmission of Airborne Illnesses](#) and [Clean Air in Buildings Challenge, EPA](#) for information and ventilation options, including for facilities with and without heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems
- Ability of people to physically distance in the setting
- Suspected or confirmed outbreak of COVID-19 in the setting
 - Indoor mask use is strongly recommended when there is an outbreak in a non-health care congregate setting.

When [CDC COVID-19 Community Level](#) is high, CDC and DOH recommend that all people wear masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status. Establishments should not discourage individuals from wearing masks if they choose to do so. See below for individual masking recommendations and risk-based considerations.

Individual Mask Recommendations

People with symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a high quality mask or respirator, in accordance with [What to do if you test positive for COVID-19](#), [COVID-19 Symptom Decision Trees](#), and [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19](#). Individuals must wear a mask if required for the setting they are in according to [Current Mandates and Health Orders](#).

In any circumstance, you can choose to wear a mask. Consider the following factors when deciding whether to wear a mask:

- Your vaccination status and the vaccination status of those around you. People who are not [up to date](#) on COVID-19 vaccines and boosters are more susceptible to COVID-19 and to developing severe disease.
- Your [medical conditions](#) and the medical conditions of those around you that are at increased risk of severe COVID-19 disease. People with certain medical conditions are more susceptible to COVID-19 and to developing severe disease.
- The characteristics of the setting you are in (e.g., crowded, poorly ventilated, indoors).
- [CDC COVID-19 Community Level](#)
 - When community levels of disease are [high](#), CDC and WA DOH recommend wearing masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status.
 - When community levels of disease are [medium or high](#), CDC and WA DOH recommend that people at [high risk of getting very sick](#) from COVID-19 wear a high-quality mask or respirator when indoors in public. People who have household or social contact with someone at high risk of getting very sick should consider wearing a high-quality mask when indoors with them.

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), [how and when people should get tested](#), and [where to find vaccines](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

A person's race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Have more questions? Call our COVID-19 Information hotline at **1-800-525-0127**. Hotline hours:

- Monday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- Tuesday through Sunday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- [observed state holidays](#) from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about your own health or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.

Appendix A

Health Care Setting

Per the [Secretary of Health's Mask Order](#), Health care settings and long-term care settings are any public or private setting that is primarily used for the delivery of in-person health care services to people, with some exceptions. If located in a facility that is primarily used for the delivery of health-care services, such as a hospital, then the entire facility is a health care setting or long-term care setting, and face coverings must be worn throughout the facility, subject to the exceptions and exemptions in the face covering order. If located in a facility that is primarily used for another purpose, such as a pharmacy within a grocery store or a school nurse's office, the health care setting or long-term care setting includes only the areas that are primarily used for the delivery of health care, but not the other areas of the facility. Face coverings must be worn in the areas primarily used for the delivery of health care, subject to the exceptions and exemptions in the face covering order. Unless excluded below, health care providers include individuals with credentials listed in the [Healthcare Professional Credentialing Requirements](#) list as well as individuals who are permitted by law to provide health care services without holding a credential. **All employees and visitors, in addition to the health care professionals, are required to wear a mask when indoors in health care settings.**

The following is a non-exclusive list of health care settings and long-term care settings:

- Acute care facilities, including, but not limited to, hospitals;
- Long-term acute care facilities;
- Inpatient rehabilitation facilities;
- Inpatient behavioral health facilities, including, but not limited to, evaluation and treatment facilities, residential treatment facilities, secure detox facilities;
- Residential long-term care facilities, including, but not limited to, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, adult family homes, settings where certified community residential services and supports are provided, and enhanced services facilities;
- Mobile clinics or other vehicles where health care is delivered;
- Outpatient facilities, including, but not limited to, dialysis centers, physician offices, and behavioral health facilities (including offices of psychiatrists, mental health counselors, and substance use disorder professionals);
- Dental and dental specialty facilities;
- Optometry and ophthalmology facilities;
- Pharmacies (not including the retail areas);
- Massage therapy offices (this includes designated areas where massage is administered within non-health care settings like spas and wellness/fitness centers);
- Chiropractic offices;
- Midwifery practices and stand-alone birth centers;
- Isolation and/or quarantine facilities;
- Ambulatory surgical facilities;
- Urgent care centers;
- Hospice care centers; and

- Settings where home health care, home care, personal care, or hospice care services are delivered by paid providers.

Health care settings and long-term care settings do not include:

- Settings where sports and spectator events or other gatherings are held (including when credentialed athletic trainers are providing care to players), other than areas primarily used for the delivery of health care services, such as designated first aid areas (which are health care settings);
- Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF)-licensed foster homes that do not primarily provide health care services;
- Research facilities where no health care is delivered to people;
- Veterinary health care settings;
- Animal control agencies;
- Non-profit humane societies; and
- Marijuana retail outlets, including those where medical marijuana consultants provide services.

If the health care facility requires masks outdoors, you must adhere to their business rules. See the [“rules of the room”](#) information above for more information. Please visit the [COVID-19 Infection Prevention in Healthcare Settings](#) page for detailed guidance including [source control guidance](#) and visitation guidance to certain health care facilities.

Rules of the Room

Businesses, organizations, facilities, and establishments have the right to set their own rules for wearing masks in their establishment or facility. Businesses are required to follow all requirements in [L&I requirements](#) and may choose to require masks in settings (e.g. outdoors) to be more protective than the [Secretary of Health’s Mask Order](#).

Local public health officials may also put more protective mask orders in place to limit transmission in the community. These rules can be more protective than the [Secretary of Health’s Mask Order](#), but they cannot be less protective.

Additionally, some individuals may need to, or choose to, continue to wear a mask. They have the right to choose to wear masks in public even when state or local masking mandates are not active. Please respect their choice to wear masks to protect themselves, their family and communities. Note that if you choose to wear a mask you may be asked to briefly remove it in situations such as those for identification purposes.