

Masks Guidance During COVID-19

Summary of March 14, 2022 Changes

- Updated to align with changes to the [Secretary of Health Mask Order](#) and [Governor Proclamation](#)

Introduction

When you wear a mask, you help protect others around you as well as yourself. In responding to this pandemic, we have learned that there are times and places where wearing a mask can greatly reduce transmission of COVID-19 from person-to-person, saving lives and helping to keep the economy open safely and wisely. Layered prevention strategies such as staying up to date on vaccines and wearing masks can help prevent severe illness and reduce the potential for strain on the healthcare system – especially when levels of transmission are high.

Per the CDC, some masks and respirators offer higher levels of protection than others, and some may be harder to tolerate or wear consistently than others. It is most important to wear a well-fitting mask or respirator correctly that is comfortable for you and that provides good protection. More information can be found on the CDC's webpage on [types of masks and respirators](#).

A face shield with a drape can be used by people with developmental, behavioral, or medical conditions that prevent them from wearing a mask. Face shields with a cloth drape may also be used; including by children in child care, day camp, and K-12 settings if a well-fitting mask is not tolerated. See the DOH guidance for masking information for [K-12 Schools, Child Care, Early Learning, Youth Development, and Day Camp Programs](#). In addition, See the CDC's section [Considerations for specific groups of people](#) for more information. DOH does not recommend the use of masks with exhalation valves or vents, or single layer bandanas and gaiters.

In the [workplace](#), certain types of masks or respirators may be required. Respirators with exhalation valves may be used in accordance with guidance published by the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and [Washington State Department of Labor & Industries \(L&I\)](#).

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

Current Mandates and Health Orders

The current public orders are listed below require people to wear masks in certain settings including:

- [Healthcare Settings](#)
- Correctional and Jail Facilities (adult prisons and jails)
- [Public Transportation](#)

Washington State Department of Health Order

The [Secretary of Health Mask Order](#) requires Washingtonians to wear masks in [health care settings](#) and adult prison and jail facilities, regardless of vaccination status with limited exceptions and exemptions. People are individually responsible to comply with this order; however, businesses also have responsibilities to enforce this with their employees and customers. Please see the orders below for additional information.

Federal Order

Requirements for public transportation are found in the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention order](#). This order requires mask wearing by passengers on all public transportation and in transportation hubs including but not limited to airplanes, ships, ferries, trains, subways, buses, taxis, and ride-shares. Operators of public transportation must require all passengers to wear masks when boarding, disembarking, and for the duration of travel. More information can be found on the [CDC's webpage for Legal Authorities](#).

CDC does not require people to wear masks on buses or vans operated by public or private K-12 school systems or early care and education/child care (ECE) programs. At their discretion, school systems and ECE programs may choose to require that people wear masks on buses or vans. Please see the DOH [Requirements and Guidance to Mitigate COVID-19 Transmission in K-12 Schools, Child Care, Early Learning, Youth Development, and Day Camp Programs](#) guidance for more information on bus transportation.

Washington State Governor Proclamation

Information on the responsibilities and expectations for businesses involving 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 Industry and Governor Proclamation

Although masks are not required in most workplaces per the Governor's proclamation listed above, private businesses can still require masks if they choose. Please respect the [rules of the room](#). Additionally, per the [Governor's Safe Workers Proclamation](#), some employees who themselves have certain health risks or who live with people at risk for severe COVID-19 may still need to, or choose to, wear masks; workers have the right to wear a mask in order to protect themselves, their families and their communities. In 2021 the Legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill 5254, which protects a worker's right to wear a mask during a public health emergency, and this protection is now codified at [RCW 49.17.485](#).

Please see L&I's [Requirements and Guidance for Preventing COVID-19](#) and [COVID-19 Common Questions Regarding Worker Face Covering and Mask Requirements](#) for more information for workplaces.

Local Public Health Entities and Officials

Local health officials have the authority to put health orders in place to control and prevent the spread of disease within their jurisdiction. These orders may be more strict than statewide

orders, but may not be less strict. Check with the [local health jurisdiction](#) and follow all health orders in place for that area.

Recommendations

While the information above states the requirements that remain for mask use in specific settings at this time, the following information outlines general public health recommendations for consideration.

Masking Recommendations for Non-healthcare Congregate Settings

Indoor mask use is recommended when feasible in the following settings. Please see the sector-specific guidance below.

- [Homeless service provider sites](#)
- [Commercial maritime setting](#) (e.g., [commercial seafood vessels](#), cargo ships, cruise ships)
- [Crowded work setting](#) where physical distancing is not possible due to the nature of the work, such as in warehouses, factories, and food packaging and meat processing facilities
- Shared living areas of congregate living facilities (excluding bedrooms) including work release facilities, 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).

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). Public health authorities may require mask use in certain circumstances, such as outbreaks.

Non-healthcare establishments where people gather (such as businesses and organizations) may require masking in their facilities. These establishments should consider all the following factors when deciding whether to require masks in their setting:

- Vulnerability of people in the setting
 - People who are not [up to date](#) on COVID-19 vaccines are more susceptible to COVID-19 and to developing severe disease
 - People with [certain medical conditions](#) are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 disease
- Quality of ventilation in the setting - see [Ventilation and Air Quality for Reducing Transmission of COVID-19 \(wa.gov\)](#) and [Ventilation in Buildings | CDC](#) for information and ventilation options, including both facilities with and without 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-healthcare congregate setting

- When community levels of disease are high, CDC and DOH recommend that all people wear masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status. See [CDC COVID-19 Community Levels](#)

These 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 mask, in accordance with [What to do if you test positive for COVID-19](#), [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19](#), and [COVID-19 Symptom Decision Trees](#).

Individuals must wear a mask if required for the setting they are in. See [Current Mandates and Health Orders](#) section for information requirements.

Even if the above circumstances do not apply, people can wear a mask based on personal preference, informed by personal or community level of risk. Individuals should consider the following factors when deciding whether to wear a mask:

- Individual vaccination status and vaccination status of family, friends, and others around them - People who are not [up to date](#) on COVID-19 vaccines are more susceptible to COVID-19 and to developing severe disease
- Individual [medical conditions](#) and medical conditions of family, friends, and others around them that increase risk of severe COVID-19 disease
- Characteristics of the setting you are in (e.g., crowded, poorly ventilated)
- When community levels of disease are high, CDC and DOH recommend that all people wear masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status. See [CDC COVID-19 Community Levels](#)

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](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). 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 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [How to Make An Accessible, Deaf-Friendly Face Mask \(HSDC\)](#)

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

Monday – 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., Tuesday – Sunday and [observed state holidays](#), 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, 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: Glossary

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 directives](#) 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.