COVID-19 health and safety
Selecting and using masks in non–health care settings

The most effective ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection include having sick workers stay at home, physical distancing, handwashing, and cleaning and disinfecting work areas. Employers should only consider using masks as an additional control measure if physical distancing is not possible and workers are in close, prolonged contact with others.

This document provides guidance on using masks and single-use respirators in non–health care settings. For health care settings, refer to the BC Centre for Disease Control.

How COVID-19 spreads

COVID-19 is an infectious disease that mainly spreads between humans through direct contact with an infected person or their respiratory droplets. Respiratory droplets are generated by breathing, speaking, coughing, and sneezing. Your exposure risk is greatest when you have prolonged close contact with an infected person.

The virus can also spread if you touch a contaminated surface and then touch your eyes, mouth, or nose. A surface can become contaminated if droplets land on it or if someone touches it with contaminated hands.
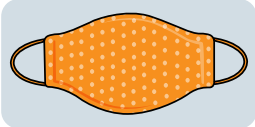
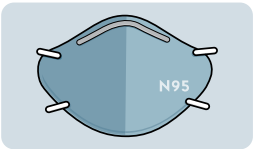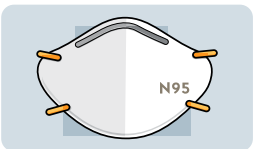## Should your workers use masks in the workplace?

Some regulated industries or industry associations may recommend or require the use of certified medical masks or single-use respirators to protect workers against chemical, physical, or biological hazards, including COVID-19.

As an employer, you need to understand the limitations of masks as a protective measure. If masks are recommended, you must ensure they are selected and used appropriately. If your workers are wearing masks, ensure they are aware of the following:

- Make sure you know how to wear your mask. Follow manufacturer or industry specifications and directions.
- Don't wear masks below the nose or chin. This can increase the risk of exposure.
- Keep your mask clean and dry. If it gets wet, it's less effective at preventing the spread of droplets.
- Change masks as necessary. You may need several masks available as they build up moisture during the day and become less effective. If your mask becomes wet, soiled, or damaged, replace it immediately.
- Make sure you know how to clean your mask. Wash cloth masks every day using the warmest water setting. Store in a clean, dry place to prevent contamination. Disposable masks cannot be laundered.
- Practise good hygiene even if you're wearing a mask. Don't remove your mask to cough or sneeze. After coughing or sneezing, wash your hands. Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.

WorkSafeBC

Types of masks and their use in non–health care settings

Type	Use
Cloth or non-medical masks	• May offer some level of protection by preventing the spread of droplets from the wearer to others around them. • Not a proven method of protection for the wearer because they may not prevent the inhalation of droplets. • May be considered by employers for use by workers or customers as a protective measure when physical distancing is not practical or feasible. • Should never be relied upon as a sole protective measure.
Medical masks	• Medical masks (also known as procedure or surgical masks) are used by health care workers for direct patient care where physical distancing can't be maintained. • May be used in other jobs where there's a risk of exposure to blood or bodily fluids. • When worn properly, can protect the wearer and others around them against droplets. • Are single-use items that are not designed to be cleaned and reused. • There is a variety of certified medical mask types, some of which may be difficult to source because of supply limitations.
Medical N95 respirators	• Used primarily by health care workers where there is significant risk of exposure to very small airborne particles and aerosols. • Offer protection from droplets and splashes. • Most often used during and after aerosol-generating procedures performed on patients infected with COVID-19 or other infectious agents. • Fit closely over the nose and mouth to form a tight seal. Must be fit-tested and worn properly. Subject to the fit-testing requirements of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulation. • Should not be used by non–health care workers.
Industrial N95 respirators	• Used primarily in non-medical settings to protect workers from inhaling dust, fumes, and other hazardous aerosols. • When worn properly, can protect the wearer against droplets. If the respirator has a valve, droplets could be spread through the valve, so may not protect others. • Fit closely over the nose and mouth to form a tight seal. Must be fit-tested and worn properly. Subject to the fit-testing requirements of the OHS Regulation.

Let's all do our part

When workplaces in British Columbia are healthy and safe, they contribute to a healthy and safe province. As COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and more businesses resume operations, let's all do our part. For more information and resources on workplace health and safety, visit **worksafebc.com**.

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