

COVID-19: Face Coverings

The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) continues to recommend that you stay home as much as possible, avoid unnecessary interactions with people who do not live in your household, practice social distancing (keep 6 feet away from others when you are outside the home), wash your hands frequently, and avoid touching your face. These are the most important steps to stop the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

As an additional measure, in line with CDC guidance, CDPH recommends wearing a cloth face covering in public settings where other social distancing measures may be difficult to maintain (for example, grocery stores and pharmacies). The covering can be a scarf, a bandana, or one you make at home. Please save medical masks, including N95s and surgical masks, for our healthcare workers and first responders who truly need them.

Face coverings are intended as a precaution to protect others in case you have contracted COVID-19 but don't yet have symptoms. This guidance is in response to new studies that have shown that people can spread the virus to others before showing symptoms. Face coverings are voluntary, not required.

Illinois remains under a Stay at Home order and people should NOT feel they can go outside more because they are wearing a face covering.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a face covering?

A face covering can be a scarf, a bandana or one you make at home that covers your mouth and nose.

Who should wear a face covering?

All Chicagoans who need to be outside their home and may be in settings where they cannot maintain 6 feet of distance from others, can wear a face covering as an additional, voluntary precaution.

People who are sick should wear a face covering while at home if possible, particularly if they need to be within 6 feet of others who share their home. People who are sick and who need to leave home, such as to get urgent medical care, should always wear a face covering.

Do I need to wear a face covering all the time when outside my house?

If you are sick, by law in Chicago, you should not be outside your home at all unless you are seeking essential medical care. Others should bring you basic necessities such as medicine or food. If you are leaving your home to seek medical care or for basic necessities, you should wear a face covering.

If you are not sick, you can wear a face covering when you need to leave home and might be within 6 feet of others, especially for more than 10 minutes. Examples include riding the subway or bus, riding in a taxi or car service, walking on a busy street or being in a crowded area, going to pharmacies and grocery stores, or going to the doctor or a hospital.

Essential workers can also wear a face covering at work when they cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance between themselves and others. This is not a requirement. Face coverings do not replace social distancing and careful hand hygiene.

*Adapted from the New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
This version was released on 04/05/2020. It may be updated with new guidance.
Please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus to find the latest version.*



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

No — as long as you maintain at least 6 feet from others.

People should only do exercise that enables them to keep physical distance from others. Walking, running, and biking are good examples of activities that do not require shared equipment or close contact with others.

I was confirmed to have COVID-19 and am better now, do I still need to wear a face covering?

There is a lot we still don't know about COVID-19. For this reason, we recommend that you continue physical distancing and other precautions even after you are better. This includes wearing a face covering when you are outside your home and cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance between yourself and others.

Remember if you had or may have had COVID-19, you should not leave the house except for essential medical care or to get essential needs until

- at least 7 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared; AND
- at least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since your fever has resolved (i.e. no fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications) and your other symptoms are improving,

For example, if you have a fever and cough for 3 days, you need to stay home for 4 more days for a minimum of 7 days. If you have a fever and cough for 4 days, you need to stay home for 3 more days without fever for a total of 7 days. If you have a fever and cough for 5 days, you need to stay home for 3 more days without fever for a total of 8 days.

Why are you recommending this now?

There is a lot we are still learning about COVID-19. We now know from recent studies that some individuals with coronavirus lack symptoms (“asymptomatic”) and that even those who eventually develop symptoms (“pre-symptomatic”) can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people who are interacting within 6 feet—for example, by clearing your throat, coughing, singing, sneezing, or even talking—even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms.

Staying home and practicing social distancing and good hand hygiene remain the most important ways to stop the spread of COVID-19. By recommending that Chicagoans use a face covering, we are adding one more thing that may help reduce the spread of disease, especially from people who are sick and do not know it yet.

Please do not hoard paper masks, especially medical grade masks, such as N95 masks or surgical masks. These masks are in very short supply and our health care providers need masks to stay healthy and to care for the most critically ill. Health care workers cannot keep distance from others, avoid sick people, or avoid contact with others' bodily fluid such as saliva, so it is essential that we reserve masks for them.

How often do I need to wash my face covering?

We recommend washing once per day by hand or by machine using detergent. The face covering should be fully dry before using. People should have a couple of face coverings so they can rotate for washing.

For how long can I use a paper face covering?

If you use a non-health care worker paper face covering, we recommend that you use a new one every day. Please don't use health care worker masks, such as N95 or surgical masks. It is essential that we save health care worker masks for our health care workers! Use a bandana, a scarf, or a covering that you have made yourself rather than using masks that are needed by our health care workers on the front lines of this pandemic.

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Are there precautions I should take with my face covering?

- In taking on and off a face covering, you will likely touch your face. As such, please wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water or, if not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer every time you take on and off your face covering.
- Do not put used face coverings in places where others can touch them or where germs trapped in your face covering can touch other surfaces, such as on counter tops or your kitchen table. Put them in the wash.
- Used paper masks should be thrown out at the end of the day.
- Do not throw your face covering loose in a bag or backpack. We recommend keeping a paper or plastic sack with you to store your face covering if you will be taking it off when outside the house.

Is it possible to make your own face covering?

Yes! A face covering can be a scarf, bandana or other cloth.

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