

COVID-19 Guidance on the Use of Face Coverings

Background

Under [Governor Pritzker's May 1 Executive Order](#), any individual who is over age two and able to medically tolerate a face covering (a mask or cloth face covering) is required to cover their nose and mouth with a face covering when in a public place and unable to maintain a six-foot social distance. Face coverings are required in public indoor spaces such as stores.

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 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. These face coverings are not a substitute for social distancing. 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.

When should I wear a face covering?

All Chicagoans are required to wear a face covering when they must leave their home or report to work for essential operations and they either cannot or it is impractical to maintain 6 feet of physical distance between themselves and others. Examples include:

- Shopping at essential businesses, like grocery stores or pharmacies,
- Picking up food from the drive thru or curbside pickup,
- While visiting your health care provider,
- Traveling on public transportation,
- Interacting with customers, clients, or coworkers at essential businesses,
- Performing essential services for state and local government agencies, such as laboratory testing, where close interactions with other people are unavoidable, and

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- When feeling sick, coughing, or sneezing.

People who are sick should wear a face covering while at home, 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 still need to stay at least 6 feet away from people if wearing a cloth face covering?

Yes. Wearing cloth face coverings is an additional public health measure people should take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. CDPH still recommends that you stay at least 6 feet away from other people (social distancing), frequent hand cleaning and other everyday preventive actions. A cloth face covering is not intended to protect the wearer, but it may prevent the spread of virus from the wearer to others. This would be especially important if someone is infected but does not have symptoms.

Who should not wear cloth face coverings?

Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children younger than 2 years of age, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.

If you're not sick and no one else in your home is sick, you don't need to wear a face covering while at home. Other situations that don't require a face covering include running or walking in your neighborhood, mowing the lawn, performing spring yard cleanup, gardening, driveway car washing, and other outdoor activities on your own property.

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 always wear a face covering.

If you are not sick, you should 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 should also wear a face covering at work when they cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance between themselves and others. Please note that face coverings do not replace social distancing and careful hand hygiene.

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.

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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.

Why do I need to wear a cloth face covering?

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.

Why are you recommending cloth face coverings instead of medical grade facemasks?

Surgical masks and N95 respirators are in short supply and should be reserved for healthcare workers or other medical first responders. They need masks to stay healthy and to care for the most critically ill. Healthcare 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 medical masks for them.

How should I wear a face covering?

Cloth face coverings should:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

How can I safely remove a used cloth face covering?

You should be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing your face covering and wash hands immediately after removing.

How do I care for my face covering?

It's a good idea to wash your face covering at least daily. Place your used face coverings in a bag or bin away from small children or pets until they can be laundered with detergent and dried on a hot cycle. If you need to remove and reuse your face covering before washing, consider putting it in a plastic or paper bag (not your backpack or purse) and be mindful not to put the face covering where others can touch it or where it will

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contaminate other, shared surfaces. Wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face.

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?

Paper-based masks, like those crafted from shop towels, should be thrown out after each use.

How can I get or make my own face covering?

Whether you use cotton fabrics, paper-based shop towels, or other materials, try to strike a balance between the materials you already have at home, how easy it will be to breathe while wearing the face covering for extended periods away from home, and whether or not you would prefer to craft a new face covering every day (paper) or wash and reuse your face covering(s). There are a number of online resources with instructions for making homemade face coverings from cloth fabric or paper. See [CDC DIY Cloth Face Coverings](#).

For more information, see [CDC Recommendations for Cloth Face Covers](#).