

# Guidance on Cloth Face Coverings from the Washington State Department of Health

Washington State is currently experiencing significant community-based transmission of COVID-19. Recent information suggests that a significant portion of persons with COVID-19 may not have any symptoms, and even those who do have symptoms can transmit the infection before showing signs of illness.

The Washington State Department of Health and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) now recommend that people wear cloth face coverings when they are in public settings where they cannot maintain 6 feet of distance from others. This might include trips to the grocery store, pharmacy, hardware store, health clinic or similar places.

**This recommendation is not a substitute for existing guidance to maintain 6-feet of physical distance from non-household members and performing frequent hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wearing cloth face coverings will not prevent spread of COVID-19 without these other protective measures.**

This is not a mandate that you must wear a face covering. It is considered an additional layer of protection.

## Guidance

Our best community and individual defense against COVID-19 is:

- Performing frequent hand hygiene,
- Avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands,
- Avoiding being around sick people, and
- Practicing social distancing, especially by staying at home.

If you wear a face covering, wash your hands before and after touching and adjusting the mask.

It is critical that this guidance does not put increased demand on medical grade masks, such as N95 respirators and surgical masks. This guidance is for cloth face coverings only.

A strong health care delivery system and emergency response system is also an essential core defense to save lives when people do get ill.

## FAQ

What is a cloth face covering?

A cloth face covering is fabric that covers the nose and mouth. It can be:

- A sewn mask secured with ties or straps around the head or behind the ears
- A piece of fabric tied around a person's head.
- Made from variety of materials, such as fleece, cotton or linen.

- Factory-made or made from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts or towels.

If you would like to sew your own mask, see [How to Sew a Face Mask](#) (New York Times) for step-by-step instructions.

### Do cloth face coverings prevent the spread of COVID-19?

There is limited evidence to suggest that use of cloth face coverings helps reduce disease transmission. However, they can reduce the release of infectious particles into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes, including someone who has COVID-19 but feels well. Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing, washing your hands, and staying home when you are ill, but they may be helpful when combined with these measures.

### When should I wear a cloth face covering?

You may choose to wear a cloth face covering when you are in public for an essential activity, such as shopping at the grocery store. Wearing a cloth face covering does not eliminate the need for other preventive measures, such as washing hands and social distancing.

### How should I care for a cloth face covering?

Wash your cloth face covering frequently, ideally after each use, or at least daily. Masks should be washed with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. If you must re-wear your cloth face covering before washing, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. Discard cloth face coverings that:

- No longer cover the nose and mouth
- Have stretched out or damaged ties or straps
- Cannot stay on your face
- Have holes or tears in the fabric

## 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.

The risk of COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity or nationality. [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 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

**Have more questions about COVID-19?** Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.

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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](mailto:civil.rights@doh.wa.gov).