

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) FAQ for Face Coverings

Mandatory Face Coverings in Indoor Spaces of Businesses or Organizations

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Background

- The Province of Ontario has mandated face coverings in indoor spaces. Some **exemptions** to the use of face coverings apply. Face coverings must cover the nose, mouth, and chin.
 - Our local Letter of Instruction was amended November 23, 2020 to align with the provincial regulation. This outlines additional requirements not included in the provincial regulation.
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What happened to the Southwestern Public Health Letter of Instruction regarding face coverings?

On July 30, 2020, Southwestern Public Health issued a Letter of Instruction (LOI) to all businesses and organizations operating within the region. This letter mandated the wearing of face coverings in all enclosed public spaces within the region, with the goal of lowering the transmission of COVID-19 in these spaces. At the time, face coverings were recommended, but not mandated, across the province.

In early October, the Province of Ontario updated **Ontario Regulation 364/20** to mandate face coverings within indoor spaces of business or organizations province-wide. ***It is your responsibility as a business operating in the province, to familiarize yourself with this Regulation.***

The Ontario mandatory face covering regulation aligns very closely with our original Letter of Instruction. As a result, to fully align with the rest of Ontario, the Ministry regulation (364/20) outlined above will replace the SWPH Letter of Instruction, but with *some critical pieces from our original letter carried over. Our revised Letter of Instruction is dated November 23, 2020.* This includes the need for businesses and organizations to have a policy regarding face coverings, signage posted stating that face coverings are required, and making hand sanitizer available at entrances and exits.

What establishments are included?

The provincial regulation applies to the indoor area of the premises of a business or organization, or in a vehicle that is operating as part of the business or organization.

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I own/operate/am responsible for one of these defined businesses/organizations. What is my responsibility?

Ontario Regulation 364/20 states that: "The person responsible for a business or organization that is open shall ensure that any person in the indoor area of the premises of the business or organization, or in a vehicle that is operating as part of the business or organization, wears a mask or face covering in a manner that covers their mouth, nose and chin during any period when they are in the indoor area." This requirement applies unless an exemption is applicable as outlined in the regulation (Schedule 1, Section 2(4)).

Our local [Letter of Instruction](#) outlines additional requirements for businesses and organizations to:

- Have a policy in place on how the provincial face covering requirements will be implemented, including staff training.
- Post signage posted to inform all patrons, customers, and clients that face coverings are required.
- Have alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with 60-90% alcohol) available at entrances and exits.

As a reminder, Ontario Regulation 364/20, a regulation under the new *Reopening Ontario Act*, also requires persons responsible for a place of business or a facility that is open to the public to limit the number of people in the place of business or facility. This is so that every member of the public can maintain physical distancing of at least two metres (6 feet) from one another. In addition, worker protections such as eye protection where patrons without face coverings are within two metres of workers are now required. As a business operating in the province, it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with this Regulation to understand any additional requirements that apply to your business or organization.

As a member of the public, what is my responsibility when I visit a business or organization?

You are required to wear a face covering while in indoor spaces. This includes wearing a face covering when you enter the establishment, and for the entire time, you are there. You are not permitted to remove the face covering unless for temporary reasons – such as emergencies, or to eat or to drink. Your face covering must cover your mouth, nose and chin without gaping.

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In what situations may a face covering be exempt?

Certain individuals may be exempt from wearing a face covering. The provincial regulation regarding face coverings outlines specific exemptions [here](#). Remember, some individuals cannot wear a face covering for medical reasons which are not always visible or apparent. The provincial regulation outlines that individuals are not required to present evidence to businesses or organizations that they are entitled to any exemptions. Do not require anyone to show proof of exemption. We hope everyone takes responsibility to help contain COVID-19 and that no one makes a false exemption claim.

I have a condition that prevents me from wearing a face covering. Can I still visit these establishments?

We recognize that there are individuals who cannot wear a face covering for medical reasons. Although businesses or organizations may ask if you have an applicable exemption, **you are not required to show proof of your exemption**. Some operators may choose to offer services in alternative ways to individuals that are exempt from wearing a face covering (i.e. curbside pick-up, delivery or online ordering).

How will this be enforced?

In collaboration with our community partners (Municipalities, Police Services), Southwestern Public Health takes a progressive enforcement approach to address non-compliance to the provincial requirements. Progressive enforcement is a continuum, starting with education and awareness, progressing to a verbal warning, written warning, and stronger deterrents such as tickets (monetary penalty) and orders. Fortunately, most compliance issues can be resolved at the first level of education and awareness. For on-going non-compliance, however, enforcement action may be required. Local by-law enforcement or police officers are the ones to determine if an individual should be fined for not obeying the provincial regulations under the *Reopening Ontario Act*.

How do I report a non-compliant business or individual?

To report a non-compliant business or individual, please call the by-law enforcement for the municipality where the business exists.

Are there fines for not wearing a face covering under this instruction?

Yes. While we encourage and support an education-first approach that is supportive to all persons, those who do not comply with the requirements may face a fine. The Province of Ontario implemented regulations on the mandatory wearing of a mask or face covering through Ontario Regulation 364/20

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(Rules for Areas in Stage 3) and Ontario Regulation 263/20 (Rules for Areas in Stage 2) made under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020*. As per the *Reopening Ontario Act*, those who do not comply with the above-noted requirements may be fined. Individuals may be liable for a fine of \$750-\$1,000 up to a maximum of \$100,000, while corporations may be liable for a fine of up to \$10,000,000 for each day or part of each day on which the offence occurs or continues.

Local by-law enforcement or police officers are the ones to determine if an individual should be fined for not obeying the provincial regulations under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020*.

Are people allowed to be exempt for religious reasons?

No. The provincial regulation does not specifically state religion as a valid reason for exemption. Businesses or organizations encountering individuals claiming this as an exemption should educate the individuals on the appropriate exemptions under the regulation. Education is the extent of the business/organization's role. If there are ongoing concerns businesses are encouraged to contact the health unit for more support and investigation.

Can customers remove their face covering?

The provincial regulation outlines an exemption for individuals who need to temporarily remove their mask or face covering while in the indoor area. Face coverings can be temporarily removed:

- To receive services that require the removal of their mask or face covering,
- To engage in athletic or fitness activity,
- To consume food or drink, or
- As may be necessary for the purposes of health and safety

These exemptions for temporary removal of face coverings may be affected depending upon the specific service being provided or the specific provisions related to the colour Zone that SWPH is in. Reference should be made to [Ontario Regulation 364/20](#).

Are employees required to wear a face covering at all times?

Staff working in indoor areas accessible only to employees who are physically distanced from all other staff members in that space may remove their face covering.

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The provincial regulation does not allow for employees in areas accessible to the public working behind or within a physical barrier to remove their face covering.

What happens if an employee needs an exemption from wearing a mask?

The business should make all efforts to accommodate the employee to a position that is away from the public or in an area accessible only to employees. If the business cannot accommodate these health and safety measures for employees who require an exemption, they need to discuss this with the Ministry of Labour to determine next steps.

How do I safely wear a face covering?

Health Canada provides an [excellent resource](#) for how to put on a non-medical mask or face covering. Southwestern Public Health has additional resources, including [this video](#) for putting on and removing a face covering, and this [signage](#) for properly wearing a face covering.

What is a face covering?

Face coverings include medical or non-medical masks, bandanas or scarfs covering the mouth, nose and chin. Wearing a face covering is intended to protect other people from your germs, and their face covering protects you from their germs.

According to [Health Canada](#), face coverings should:

- be made of at least three layers
 - 2 layers should be tightly woven material fabric, such as cotton or linen
 - The third (middle) layer should be a filter-type fabric, such as non-woven polypropylene fabric
- be large enough to completely and comfortably cover the nose, mouth and chin without gaping
- fit snugly to the nose, mouth and chin and secured to the head with ties or ear loops
- allow for easy breathing
- maintain shape after washing and drying
- be comfortable when worn so as not to require frequent adjusting
- be changed as soon as possible if damp or dirty

Masks with exhalation valves are not recommended, because they don't protect others from COVID-19 and don't limit the spread of the virus.

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Is a plastic face shield considered a face covering?

No. When you wear a plastic face shield, you do not have a snug fit around your nose, mouth and chin. A face shield may be used in combination with another form of protection (such as a non-medical mask, bandana, or other face covering, for example) to provide extra precaution for the wearer against droplets from another person.

Evidence shows that plastic face shields alone are NOT the equivalent to wearing a face covering. It does not filter respiratory droplets and does not provide a snug fit. However, the [World Health Organization](#) supports the use of face shields as a "better than nothing" approach. At a minimum, the face shield should cover the sides of the face and extend below the chin.

Do I have to wear a mask when in my apartment building or condominium?

In premises used as a dwelling (i.e. apartments, condominiums, shelters), face coverings are required in common areas of the premises where people are unable to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from other persons.

Does the provincial regulation apply to places of worship?

Yes, places of worship would be considered businesses or organizations under Ontario Regulation 364/20, and therefore the face covering requirements apply.

Where can I find more information?

Visit the provincial face covering webpage [here](#).

View the full Ontario Regulation 364/20 [here](#). The information pertaining to face coverings can be found in Schedule 1, Section 2, Subsections 4-6.

Call the Southwestern Public Health COVID-19 Call Centre at 1-800-922-0096 ext. 9 or visit www.swpublichealth.ca/WorkplacesCOVID-19 for information, signage and other resources to support face covering policies.