

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Mandatory Face Coverings in the Health Unit's District

1. Is it mandatory to wear a face covering inside enclosed public spaces and transportation?

a) Is wearing a face covering inside enclosed businesses, organizations and services mandatory?

Effective Friday, July 24, 2020, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (Health Unit) will require the use of face coverings in certain enclosed public spaces (businesses, organizations, and services) and transportation (as defined in 3a. below) in our district. This mandate falls under the province's [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act](#) and supports a successful and safe implementation of Stage 3 of [Reopening Ontario](#).

A **face covering** is a cloth face covering, or other face covering with *preferably* two layers of material that securely covers the nose, mouth, and chin and is in contact with the surrounding face without gapping in order to contain coughs, sneezes and respiratory spit and spray of the person wearing the face covering. Face coverings such as a bandana, scarf, cloth, niqab or burka are not designed to filter air and do not have a number of layers; however they are a better alternative if a face covering is not available. (Where possible, a cloth mask should be worn underneath a head covering to ensure best fit against the face.)

As part of COVID-19 prevention efforts, the Health Unit has developed instructions for owners/operators of businesses, organizations and other services to help them apply a policy to their workplace that requires face coverings to be worn in enclosed public spaces, including transportation. Exemptions are in effect for multiple reasons, including medical and age-related, and no proof is required.

We recognize that policies may differ between health unit districts. We understand that this can be challenging. Continue to be respectful and patient of others. When visiting or accessing a business, organization or service, including transportation, please follow their face covering rules. Everyone is doing their best to keep each of us safe in this ever-changing situation.

Owners and operators of outdoor spaces are still expected to:

- **Continue to ensure physical distancing;**
- **Use face coverings if a two metres distance cannot be maintained; and**
- **Promote excellent hand hygiene practices.**

b) How long is this going to be in place?

The current instructions are made by the Medical Officer of Health under the authority of the provincial [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act](#) and related Orders. The Medical Officer of Health continues to assess the need for public health measures and will reassess actions as legislation and local and provincial COVID-19 circumstance evolve.

2. Why are face coverings being made mandatory?

a) Why are face coverings now being made mandatory in enclosed public spaces and transportation?

We have all worked hard to flatten the curve. However, COVID-19 can spread quickly and people are still at risk. As more research is being done, we are better able to understand this virus and know that people can be infected and spread the virus without having any symptoms themselves.

As Ontario reopens, we will start coming into contact with more and more people on a daily basis. We therefore ask that you wear a face covering. Increasingly, research points to the use of face coverings as an additional way of preventing the person wearing the face covering from spreading the virus to others.

Face coverings are recommended because they:

- keep our respiratory spit and spray to ourselves and help to prevent the spread of the virus to others;
- provide a safe, inexpensive way to reduce the spread of COVID-19; and
- act as a visual reminder to others to remain aware and stay physically distant from others.

b) Does wearing a face covering prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Wearing a face covering protects people around you and helps to stop the spread of COVID-19. Because people can have COVID-19 and not know or show symptoms, you should wear a face covering when physical distancing outside your COVID-19 social circle is a challenge. When other people wear a face covering they are helping to protect you as well. Wearing a face covering alone cannot guarantee protection from the virus thus is done in combination with other proven measures. These measures include: physical distancing; handwashing or using an alcohol based hand-sanitizer (with minimum alcohol concentration of 60%) often; avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands; and isolating yourself when you are having symptoms and arranging for COVID-19 testing.

c) What is the evidence that supports the wearing of face coverings?

Public health advice is evidence-based. As the science and our understanding of the virus has grown, our stance on face coverings has changed. Research shows that the use of face coverings by all persons helps decrease the spread of COVID-19 and prevents the virus from landing on surfaces after a cough or sneeze.

Expert opinion supports the widespread use of face coverings to decrease the spread of COVID-19:

- Government of Canada, [non-medical masks and face coverings](#)
- Government of Ontario, [face covering and face masks](#)
- [Public Health Ontario's synopsis - COVID-19 & COVID-19—what we know so far about...wearing masks in public](#)

3. In which enclosed public spaces are face coverings mandatory?

a) What are the enclosed public spaces where face coverings are required?

Face coverings must be worn in ‘enclosed public spaces’. This means indoor spaces of businesses, organizations, and services accessed by the public, including transportation. Face coverings should also be worn in other spaces (indoor or outdoor) where physical distancing is challenging or not possible.

Under this mandate, enclosed public spaces include, but are not limited to:

- common areas of banks/financial institutions;
- common areas of hospitals and independent health facilities such as lobbies, food courts, and retail establishments;
- common areas of hotels, motels, or short-term rental premises such as lobbies, elevators, meeting rooms, rest rooms, laundry rooms, gyms, and kitchens;
- common areas of mechanics’ shops, garages, and repair shops;
- common areas of premises under the control of a regulated health professional under the [Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, S.O. 1991, c. 18](#), as amended, such as waiting rooms;
- convenience stores;
- farmer’s markets;
- grocery stores and bakeries;
- libraries, museums, art galleries, recreational facilities, bingo halls, community centres and halls, cinemas, theatres, concert venues, special event venues, convention centers, or other similar entertainment, cultural, or leisure facilities;
- organization, government, and business offices (publicly accessible areas) including spaces where training is being provided to the public;
- personal service settings (e.g. spas, hair salons, barbers, nail salons) that are subject to health and safety protocols provided by the Province of Ontario during the provincial emergency;
- places of worship (e.g. churches, mosques, synagogues, temples);
- private business transportation (e.g. company vehicle)
- private transportation (e.g. taxis, rideshare services);
- public transportation (e.g., bus or train);
- restaurants, cafés, cafeterias, food premises, banquet halls, nightclubs, bars;
- retail establishments and shopping malls; and
- sports facilities, sports clubs, gyms, yoga studios, dance studios, and stadiums.

b) What enclosed public spaces are NOT included?

The following are public spaces exempt from the policy:

- Spaces subject to provincial and/or local public health guidance:
 - child care centres and providers governed by the [Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, S.O. 2014, c. 11](#), as amended (**except when medical masks are required, as directed**);
 - day camps, and
 - schools under the [Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2](#), as amended;
**Parents / guardians are required to wear a face covering when entering a common area of these premises.*
- Indoor areas of a business, organizations, or services that are not designated for public access – if staff members can maintain physical distance of two metres from one another; and
- offices not open to the public including professional offices where clients receive services by appointment only (e.g. lawyer, accountant) – except waiting room, as applicable, or if physical distancing of two metres is unable to be maintained

Note: Some workplaces may be required under provincial guidance, health and safety, regulatory body, or other authority to take specific measures over and above recommended public health measures.

c) Do I have to wear a face covering inside a restaurant?

The owner/operator of food premises must comply with [Schedule 2 of the Ontario Regulation 364/20](#). When customers are in a position where physical distancing may not be possible (e.g. to enter and exit the building, to use the washroom, to pick up take-out food, etc.) a face covering is required. While at their table, restaurant customers are not required to wear a face covering.

d) Do I have to wear a face covering in a sports facility, sports club, gym, yoga studio, dance studio, or stadium?

It is most important to wear a face covering when entering and exiting the facility and accessing common areas: the bathroom, the locker area, the shower area, etc. It may be difficult to exercise or perform a fitness activity with a face covering. If that is the case, you may remove the face covering only if physical distancing of two metres can be maintained. Physical exercise results in heavier breathing and a greater risk for transmission of spit or spray.

e) Do I have to wear a face covering in common areas of multi-dwelling buildings (e.g. apartment buildings, condos)?

These spaces are part of a private building, so the public does not have access to these locations. Condo boards and apartment buildings can require residents to wear a face covering when in a common areas (e.g., hallways, stairways, elevators). Other protection measures, in common areas such as limiting the number of people permitted in the area at one time and maintaining physical distancing are highly recommended.

4. Who has to wear a face covering in enclosed public spaces?

a) Who has to wear a face covering?

Any person who enters an enclosed public space (business, organization, or service) including transportation is required to wear a face covering, unless they meet the criteria for exemption (see 4c. below). **A Person** in this context is defined as any customer, client, patron, staff member or visitor, who enters the premises. In all other settings, face coverings are strongly recommended if it is not possible to keep a distance of two metres.

b) Do staff of businesses, organizations, and services need to wear a face covering?

Staff need to wear a face covering when working in the public areas of the enclosed public space unless they are:

- exempt from wearing a face covering (see 4c. below); or
- within or performing duties behind, a physical barrier (e.g. plexiglass barrier); *however, staff must wear a face covering in a situation where physical distancing cannot be maintained with other staff within or behind a physical barrier*

Staff do not need to wear a face covering if they are working in an area that is not designated for public access and where physical distancing of two metres can be maintained.

c) Who is exempt from wearing a face covering?

Exemptions are in effect for multiple reasons, including medical and age-related. No proof is required. The goal is to ensure the best protection possible (including for those who cannot wear face coverings) until a vaccine or specific treatment is available.

The following persons are exempt from wearing a face covering:

- children under the age of two years; or children under the age of five years either by birth age or mental development who refuse to wear a face covering and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver;
- persons who are unable to remove their face covering without assistance under the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) or who have protections under the [Ontario Human Rights Code, R.S.O 1990, c.H.19](#), as amended;
- persons whose breathing would be inhibited by wearing a face covering;
- persons with medical conditions rendering them unable to safely wear a face covering (including but not limited to: respiratory disease, cognitive difficulties or difficulties in hearing or processing information);
- officiants (e.g. minister, rabbi, priest, imam) of a religious ceremony if standing in an area of the worship space that is separate and at least two metres apart from the public attending the ceremony;
- a person who is employed by or is owner/operator of an enclosed public space and:
 - in an area that is not designated for public access and where physical distancing of two metres can be maintained;
 - within or performing duties behind, a physical barrier (e.g. plexiglass barrier); *e however, staff must wear a face covering in a situation where physical distancing cannot be maintained with other staff within or behind a physical barrier, or*
 - in an office that is not open to the public including professional offices where clients receive services by appointment only (e.g. lawyer, accountant) – except waiting room, as applicable.
- a person who is employed in a space subject to provincial and/or local public health guidance, including:
 - child care centres and providers governed by the [Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, S.O. 2014, c. 11](#), as amended (**except when medical masks are required, as directed**);
 - day camps; and
 - schools under the [Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2](#), as amended.

**Parents / guardians are required to wear a face covering when entering a common area of these premises.*

There may be situations where someone who is deaf or hard of hearing may require a staff member to remove their face covering to speak to them. We remind anyone removing their face covering to follow safe handling procedures (see 6h) below) and to keep a physical distance of two metres away from others.

d) If I am exempt from using a face covering do I have to tell the business, organization, or service why I am not wearing one?

No. If you are reminded to wear a face covering when entering a business, organization, or service you can simply respond that you are exempt from this policy. You do not need to give any details or provide proof for exemption.

e) Can I be refused entry if I don't have a face covering on?

The strength of enforcement is up to the local business, organization, or service. Wearing a face covering is an easy way to protect others around you. Although a business, organization, or service has the right to deny entry to their premises, the policy regarding the use of face coverings indoors should be used as a means to educate people on face covering use.

We encourage our community to be 'COVID kind' and understand that not everyone can wear a face covering safely and may need accommodation and understanding.

f) Do I still need to stay two metres away from others if I am wearing a face covering?

Yes. The owner/operator of each business, organization, and service shall ensure that it is operated to enable all persons to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from other persons. Wearing a face covering is to be done as well as practicing physical distancing.

g) When can I remove my face covering in an enclosed business, organization, or service?

In an enclosed public space, face coverings must be worn at all times. However we are asking the public to use their best judgement. Where necessary, face coverings may be temporarily removed for the following purposes (it is recommended to wash hands and/or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately after removing face coverings):

- receiving services on areas covered by a face covering;
- actively engaging in an athletic or fitness activity including water-based activities;
- consuming food or drink; and
- for any emergency or medical purpose

5. What are the responsibilities of businesses, organizations, and services?

a) What are the duties of businesses, organizations, and services under this mandate?

Under this mandate, owners/operators of businesses, organizations and services, including transportation are responsible for the following duties:

1.1. Adopt a policy that requires all persons who enter or remain in an enclosed public space of the business, organization or service to wear a face covering that covers their nose, mouth and chin.

A sample policy can be found on the Health Unit's website www.myhealthunit.ca/FaceCoverings.

1.1.1. Exempt the following people from the adopted policy:

- children under the age of two years; or a children under the age of five years either by birth age or mental development who refuse to wear a face covering and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver;
- persons who are unable to remove their face covering without assistance under the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) or who have protections under the [Ontario Human Rights Code, R.S.O 1990, c.H.19](#), as amended;
- persons whose breathing would be inhibited by wearing a face covering;
- persons with medical conditions rendering them unable to safely wear a face covering including but not limited to, respiratory disease, cognitive difficulties or difficulties in hearing or processing information;
- officiants (e.g. minister, rabbi, priest, imam) of a religious ceremony if standing in an area of the worship space that is separate and at least two metres apart from the public attending the ceremony;
- a person who is employed by or is owner/operator of an enclosed public space and:
 - in an area that is not designated for public access and where physical distancing of two metres can be maintained;
 - within or performing duties behind, a physical barrier (e.g. plexiglass barrier); *however, staff must wear a face covering in a situation where physical distancing cannot be maintained with other staff within or behind a physical barrier, or*
 - in an office that is not open to the public including professional offices where clients receive services by appointment only (e.g. lawyer, accountant) – except waiting room, as applicable.

1.1.2 Permit the temporary removal of a face covering where necessary for the purpose of:

- receiving services on areas covered by a face covering;
- actively engaging in an athletic or fitness activity including water-based activities;
- consuming food or drink; and
- for any emergency or medical purpose.

1.1.3 Require that staff wear a face covering when working in the public areas of the enclosed public space unless the staff person is within or performing duties behind a physical barrier (e.g. plexiglass barrier) *provided physical distancing of two metres can be maintained among staff* or exempt and can maintain physical distancing of two metres.

1.2 Implement the policy in “good faith” and use as a means to educate people on face coverings and promote their use in enclosed public spaces.

1.2.1 Do not require anyone to provide proof of any of the exemptions listed above.

1.2.2 The strength of enforcement is up to the local business, organization, or service. Although a business, organization, or service has the right to deny entry to their premises, the policy regarding the use of face coverings indoors should be used as a means to educate people on face covering use. We encourage our community to be ‘COVID kind’ and understand that not everyone can wear a face covering safely and may need accommodation and understanding.

- 1.2.3 Post clearly visible signage at every public entrance to the premises, indicating that all persons entering or remaining in these premises must wear a face covering that securely covers the nose, mouth and chin. **Sample signage** can be found on the Health Unit's website www.myhealthunit.ca/FaceCoverings.
 - 1.2.4 Ensure that all staff are aware of the policy and are trained on expectations and implementation.
 - 1.2.5 Provide a verbal reminder to any person entering the premises without a face covering that they should be wearing a face covering, if able.
 - 1.2.6 Require, for persons in an enclosed public space removing their face covering for extended periods of time, a verbal reminder of the requirement to wear a face covering under these instructions.
 - 1.2.7 Be able to provide a copy of the policy upon request to a public health inspector or other person authorized to enforce the provisions of the [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act](#) (EMCPA).
- 1.3 Ensure the availability of alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with minimum alcohol concentration of 60%) at all entrances and exits for everyone's use when entering or exiting the premises.
- 1.4 Adhere to responsibilities for general compliance as per provincial legislation ([EMCPA O. Reg. 364/20](#)):
- 1.4.1 The owner/operator responsible for a business, organization or service that is open shall ensure that the business, organization or service operates in accordance with all applicable laws, including the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the regulations made under it.
 - 1.4.2 The owner/operator responsible for a business, organization or service that is open shall operate it in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials, including any advice, recommendations or instructions on physical distancing, cleaning or disinfecting.
 - 1.4.3 The owner/operator responsible for a place of business or facility that is open to the public shall limit the number of persons in the place of business or facility so that every member of the public is able to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person in the business or facility, except where Schedule 2 allows persons to be closer together.
 - 1.4.4 The owner/operator responsible for a business, organization or service that is open to the public shall ensure that it is operated to enable members of the public to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from other persons.

b) Are businesses, organizations, and services required to provide face coverings for the public?

Owners/operators of businesses, organizations, and services, including transportation, are not required to provide face coverings to persons entering their premises. However it is encouraged, as there are those in our communities who may struggle to purchase or find a face covering. If owners/ operators choose to do so, these must be handled and stored in a sanitary manner.

c) Can businesses, organizations, and services determine their own mandatory face covering policy?

Businesses, organizations, and services, including transportation, can determine their own policy as long as they include all the required elements identified by the Health Unit. They can also use the Health Unit's **sample policy** as a template which can be found on the Health Unit's website www.myhealthunit.ca/FaceCoverings. Since there are people who cannot use face coverings; appropriate and reasonable exemptions (see 4c. above) should be provided by the business, organization or service.

6. How do I find, use, clean and dispose of face coverings?

a) What is a face covering?

A **face covering** is a cloth face covering, or other face covering with *preferably* two layers of material that securely covers the nose, mouth, and chin and is in contact with the surrounding face without gapping in order to contain coughs, sneezes and respiratory spit and spray of the person wearing the face covering. Face coverings such as a bandana, scarf, cloth, niqab or burka are not designed to filter air and do not have a number of layers; however they are a better alternative if a face covering is not available. (Where possible, a cloth mask should be worn underneath a head covering to ensure best fit against the face.)

Canadian and Ontario public health officials recommend that medical masks (i.e. surgical, medical procedure face masks and N95 respirators) should be reserved for use by health care workers and first responders.

b) Is a face shield a suitable replacement for a face covering?

A face shield does not replace a face covering; it is eye protection. It does not adequately cover your nose, mouth, and chin. A face shield may provide additional protection for the wearer against another person's spit and spray, however these droplets may still be inhaled around the shield. COVID-19 infected spit and spray may escape around the sides of the face shield, providing less protection to others. If you choose to wear a face shield, we recommend – if possible – to wear it in addition to a properly fitted face covering.

c) Do I still need to practice physical distancing (stay two metres apart) if we are all wearing face coverings?

Yes. A face covering acts as a barrier. It reduces the chance of spreading respiratory spit and spray to others and prevents these droplets from landing on surfaces when you cough or sneeze. Wearing a face covering in public or other settings is not a replacement for measures such as physical distancing, handwashing, and limiting non-essential travel. A face covering will help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

d) How will the heat of summer affect wearing a face covering?

Wearing a face covering outdoors is necessary in situations where a two metre distance from others is not possible. Although wearing a face covering may be uncomfortable in hot temperatures, it will still work. You may need to change your face covering more frequently in hot and humid temperatures as the face covering may become damp more quickly.

e) Where can I get a face covering?

Face coverings can be purchased locally or be ordered online (e.g. retail establishments, Etsy stores). The Government of Canada also has [instructions on how to make sew and no-sew face coverings](#) if you are looking for a low-cost option.

f) How do I properly wear a face covering?

- Wash your hands using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with minimum alcohol concentration of 60%)
- Make sure the face covering fits well around your nose and mouth and allows for easy breathing.
- Make sure your face covering is secured to your head with ties or ear loops without the need to adjust frequently.
- If your face covering has pleats, ensure that the pleats on the outside are facing down.
- If your face covering has a metal strip over the nose, gently mould it over the bridge of your nose.
- Avoid touching or moving the face covering around when using it.

- Do not share your face covering with others, even within your own household or social circle.
- Replace the face covering as soon as it becomes damp, dirty, or damaged.

[Poster: How to Safely Use a Non-Medical Mask or Face Covering](#)

[Video: How to Wear a Non-Medical Mask or Face Covering Properly](#)

g) Is it okay to tuck my face covering under my chin when I'm not using it?

Although it's common to see people dangling their face coverings from their ear loops or wearing them tucked under their chin with their mouth and nose exposed, it is not recommended. There is risk of contaminating the face covering from bacteria on the chin or upper neck. We advise wearers to avoid touching face coverings as much as possible while wearing them. This includes avoiding adjusting the position of them as much as possible. Hands become contaminated by touching the outside of a face covering. Use alcohol based sanitizer (with minimum alcohol concentration of 60%) after you touch your face covering.

h) How do I wash, re-use, and discard a face covering?

Wearing a face covering can increase your risk of infection if you touch your face more frequently to adjust it or if you do not wash your hands before putting it on and taking it off. All parts of face coverings can become contaminated by breathing or when touched by your hands.

[How to properly wear, fit, remove and clean your non-medical mask](#)

i) How do I store a face covering?

Store the face covering in a paper bag, envelope, or something that does not retain moisture if you will be wearing it again.

j) There are no garbage bins outside of the stores, what do I do with my disposable face covering?

The Health Unit recommends the use of reusable face coverings. If you are using a disposable face covering please do not throw it on the ground or leave it in the store for someone else to clean up. Face coverings that haven't been properly disposed of can cause COVID-19 to spread more easily. If there is no garbage bin outside the store, bring it with you, or ask before check out for an extra grocery bag and carefully put your disposable face covering inside so you can carry it home to throw away.

7. How will the mandate be enforced?

a) How will the mandate be enforced in businesses, organizations, and services?

Every owner/operator of an enclosed public space will adopt a policy that requires all persons who enter or remain in an enclosed public space of the business, organization, or service to wear a face covering that covers their nose, mouth, and chin. Exemptions are in effect for multiple reasons, including medical and age-related (see 4c. above), and no proof is required.

Under this policy, staff and owners/operators will provide a verbal reminder to any person entering the premises without a face covering that they should be wearing a face covering as a result of this mandate.

The strength of enforcement is up to the local business, organization, or service. A business, organization, or service has the right to deny entry to their premises, however implementation of the policy should be enforced in 'good faith' and primarily used as a means to educate people on face covering use in enclosed public spaces.

Under the [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act](#), any provincial offence officer (the Health Unit, the police, and municipal bylaw officers) can enforce these requirements if required.

b) What if I want to make a comment or report a concern about an enclosed public space?

- To learn more about face coverings or COVID-19: visit <https://www.myhealthunit.ca/en/health-topics/coronavirus.asp>
- For an **owner/operator of a business, organization or service** with questions about this face covering policy: contact Health Unit COVID-19 Call Centre 1-800-563-2808 option 5
- For enforcement concerns:
 - about food premises, personal service settings or childcare centres: contact Health Unit 1-800-563-2808 ext. 5400
 - all other enforcement concerns: contact local police service non-emergency number
 - For concerns in North Bay or Callander, call the North Bay Police Service non-emergency line: 705-472-1234
 - For concerns in other areas of the North Bay Parry Sound District (e.g. West Nipissing, Burk's Falls, Sundridge, Parry Sound), call the Ontario Provincial Police non-emergency line: 1-888-310-1122