



## Guidance for Residents on Wearing Face Coverings During COVID-19

*Updated April 30, 2020*

On April 27 (and amended on April 28), the City of Cambridge issued a Temporary Emergency Order Requiring the Wearing of Masks or Cloth Face Coverings in all Public Places, Businesses and in Common Areas of Large Residential Buildings, effective April 29. The full emergency order can be found [here](#).

**A face mask is not a substitute for physical (social) distancing and regular hand washing**, which remain among the most effective ways to slow the spread of COVID-19. The single most effective way to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 is to stay home.

Wearing a mask or face covering may help people who are infected with COVID-19 but not aware of it from transmitting COVID-19 to others. A face covering is not intended to protect the wearer from getting sick.

The mask or cloth face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for health care workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.

### Why should I wear a face mask or covering?

There are [data](#) that suggest that COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms. Wearing a mask or a cloth face covering over your nose and mouth in public and community settings, especially if it is difficult to maintain proper physical distancing by keeping at least 6 feet between you and others, can protect people around you if you are infected with COVID-19 but do not have symptoms.

Many Cambridge residents have been taking seriously all advisories to maintain physical distance and to wear face masks when they cannot properly or completely distance themselves. However, there are residents who continue to shop, walk, and run throughout the city without practicing physical distancing nor wearing proper face coverings.

It is vitally important to remember that a face covering does not replace frequent handwashing, avoiding touching the face or mask exterior, staying 6 feet from others when outside, and staying away from people who are ill. **These are the most important and effective steps you can take to prevent the spread of COVID-19.**



## **Who should not wear a mask or cloth face covering?**

You should not wear a face mask if you:

- Have an underlying health condition
- Have a physical or mental disability (that prevents you from breathing properly or prohibits you from wearing your mask properly)
- Are 4 years old or younger
- Have trouble breathing
- Are unconscious, incapacitated, or not able to remove the mask without assistance

If you cannot wear a mask and need or want to go outside or to a place of business, please take important physical distancing precautions:

- Maintain a safe separation of at least 6 feet from others while outside, as well as inside any office or other building.
- Avoid crowds of any size.
- Try to visit grocery stores and pharmacies when they are less crowded.

## **Do I need to wear my face covering or mask whenever I am outside?**

Everyone over the age of 5 should wear a mask or cloth face covering that covers both the mouth and nose at all times when in public if it is not possible to practice social distancing. Such public spaces include:

- Sidewalks
- Streets
- Parks
- Plazas
- Bus stops
- Non-residential parking lots and garages
- Any other public outdoor area
- Nonresidential parking facility which is open and accessible to the general public

It is important that you keep your face covering on while outside if there is any reasonable chance of encountering another person. If you need to take off your face mask, make sure to keep it close by so that you can put it back on quickly and properly should you come into close contact with another person.

To take off your covering, grab the strings or loops, being very careful not to touch the front of the covering nor your eyes, nose, or mouth.

## **Do I have to wear my mask inside as well as outside?**

There are Cambridge businesses open to the public, which due to their small size or popularity, where you may find it extremely difficult to practice physical distancing. In these cases, everyone over the age of 5 needs to wear a face mask or covering when entering these business locations per the temporary emergency order, including:

- Grocery stores and supermarkets
- Pharmacies
- Laundromats
- Dry cleaners
- Hardware stores
- Restaurants/ cafes or similar establishments where prepared foods/meals or beverages may be purchased
- Local government buildings
- Commercial office buildings

If you are not able to practice physical distancing while inside these places of business, you must wear your mask the entire time.

It is important that you not take off your mask or face covering while inside the building. If you need to take off your face mask, make sure to keep it close by so that you can put it back on quickly and properly should you come into close contact with another person.

In addition to practicing physical distancing and wearing masks or face coverings, all essential businesses should continue to keep in place additional measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 including:

- Providing disposable gloves and hand sanitizer to all employees for use on items that are being sold, sent, or transported off-site.
- Requiring employees to wash hands, even where gloves are worn, with soapy water at regular intervals (every thirty minutes for publicly accessible businesses) and providing handwashing stations.
- Requiring employees to maintain a distance of 6 feet at all times practicable.
- Screening employees for symptoms of COVID-19 prior to allowing them on work sites.
- Ordering sick employees to stay at home.

In addition to following these important measures, all Cambridge employers of businesses open to the public should require that their employees to wear a face mask per the temporary emergency order

## **Do I need to wear a mask inside if I live in an apartment building?**

It may be difficult to maintain proper physical distancing in common spaces by maintaining at least 6 feet between yourself and others. If you are not able to be at least 6 feet from others in common spaces, the temporary executive order requires that you wear a mask. These common spaces include:

- Lobby
- Hallways
- Elevators
- Stairwells
- Laundry rooms
- Garage or parking lots
- Walkways
- Yards
- Other common outdoor and indoor areas shared by more than one apartment/townhouse when 6 feet of separation cannot reliably and consistently be maintained.

If you are with someone who lives with you, caring for a child or for a disabled or elderly person, you **do not have to maintain a distance of 6 feet from that person when in such common areas.**

## **How do I properly wear a cloth face covering or mask?**

All 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 (cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 5, persons who have trouble breathing, or anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance).
- Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.
- Be frequently washed using a washing machine with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. They can also be hand washed with soap and warm water, and left to dry.

After wearing your face mask, you should remove it carefully, avoiding touching your nose, eyes, or mouth until the face covering has been properly disposed of or placed carefully away to be washed. You should immediately wash your hands after removal.

## What precautions do I need to take when removing my face mask or covering?

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water every time you put on and take off the face covering. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth when you remove the face covering.
- Do not put a used face covering in places where others can touch them or where germs trapped in your face covering can touch other surfaces, such as counter tops or a kitchen table.
- Do not throw your face covering loose in a bag or backpack. Keep a paper bag with you to store your face covering if you will be taking it off when outside the house.

## Where can I find a face mask or cloth cover?

The City of Cambridge is distributing masks to residents. Masks will be made available to residents on a first-come, first-served basis while supplies last and quantities will be limited to the number of residents in a household. More information on this initiative, including where these masks are being distributed, can be found [here](#).

**You can also make your own face covering easily at home** by using a scarf, bandana, or other cotton cloth. There are a number of easy “do it yourself” videos and instructions to help you make your own cloth face covering at home, including:

- The CDC website has a [few patterns](#), including one that involves a coffee filter and another that requires no sewing — just scissors and the willingness to sacrifice a t-shirt! Surgeon General Jerome Adams [released a video](#) of himself making a mask out of cloth and rubber bands.
- Cambridge Health Alliance recommends this sewing mask, [here](#).
- Here is a [simple no-sew mask](#) that has a bridge for your nose, which can help keep your glasses from fogging up.

While there is no clear consensus on the most effective material to use as a face covering, tightly woven cotton or other cloth seems to be the best choice. The CDC recommends two layers of fabric with a high thread count. It is important that you can breathe comfortably through your nose while wearing the face covering.

**Important reminder:** The face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are crucial supplies that must continue to be reserved for health care workers and other medical first responders to care for the most critically ill. Health care workers and first responders cannot keep distance from others, avoid sick people, or avoid contact with others’ bodily fluid, such as respiratory secretion and saliva, so it is essential that we reserve masks for them.

## **How often should I wash my face mask or covering?**

It is recommended that you wash your face covering once a day by hand or machine using detergent. The face covering should be fully dry before using it again.

Disposable medical masks cannot be washed, but may be used in a 5-7 day rotation to allow viral particles to become non-viable on the outer surface of the mask. If you need to reuse your mask, place it in a clean paper bag after each use.

## **What is the evidence regarding face coverings as an effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19?**

The most effective way to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 is through proper physical distancing by maintaining at least 6 feet between you and everyone else. Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is also a necessary and highly effective way to limit or prevent the spread of the virus.

In a very densely populated city such as Cambridge, it can be extremely difficult to always maintain a 6-foot distance from others. Per the CDC, we now know that a significant portion of individuals with coronavirus don't experience symptoms (they are asymptomatic) or have not yet developed symptoms (they are pre-symptomatic) and can transmit the virus to others. This means that the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity—for example, talking, singing, yelling, coughing, or sneezing—even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms.

Additionally, with observations that some people in Cambridge are not practicing proper physical distancing nor wearing masks when in close proximity to others, wearing a face mask is another step toward preventing further spread of COVID-19 in Cambridge and to flatten the curve.