

# Best Practice COVID-19 Workplace Safety: Face masks

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This fact sheet provides best practice guidance on the use of face masks in the community, including workplaces and at events, to help protect against COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory viruses.

Please use this information alongside other Tasmanian best practice guidance, including *Best Practice COVID-19 Safety for Employers*.

## When are face masks recommended?

Wearing face masks remains a valuable protection against COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory viruses.

Best practice COVID-19 workplace safety is to support workers to wear face masks at work indoors and around other people when they choose or a workplace risk assessment deems it is necessary unless a risk assessment determines that wearing one would create a health or safety risk.

Use of face masks in the workplace helps workers to protect themselves and to protect others. Encouraging the use of face masks is also a reminder to workers, customers, and visitors that your workplace takes COVID-19 safety seriously.

**Face masks are recommended during periods of increased rates of staff illness due to respiratory infections, to help slow the spread of illness.**

Face masks are also recommended anytime for anyone in the workplace who:

- chooses to wear a face mask
- is working indoors and unable to physically distance
- cannot physically distance from other people
- develops COVID-19 symptoms while at work, until they leave work and arrive at their place of residence
- is living with a person who has COVID-19 or influenza
- is at risk of severe illness, including people who are not up to date with vaccination, aged 65 years or older and/or with specific underlying medical conditions (check with your doctor) and pregnant women
- provides services directly to people at risk of severe illness, especially if physical distancing is not feasible.

## When are face masks required?

- Under the *Public Health Act 1997*, close contacts (aged 12 years and over) of people with COVID-19 must wear a face mask outside their home in indoor spaces

## Why are face masks important?

### 1. COVID-19 spreads through respiratory droplets

When we cough and sneeze, and even laugh and talk, tiny droplets and aerosol particles (very tiny droplets) get forced into the air. If a person has been infected with a respiratory virus (for example, the virus that causes COVID-19) these droplets will contain tiny amounts of the virus. When another person breathes those droplets in, they may become infected with the virus.

The more crowded and less ventilated a room is, the more droplets and particles there are likely to be.

Wearing a face mask provides a barrier, reducing the risk of the wearer expelling droplets and potentially infecting others, or breathing in droplets from others.

### 2. COVID-19 may spread through touching contaminated surfaces then your face

COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses may spread by a person touching a surface contaminated with infectious respiratory droplets and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. Wearing a face mask is a good way to stop yourself unconsciously touching your face with contaminated hands.

## How can I support the use of face masks?

- Keep a supply of disposable surgical face masks readily available for use in the workplace.
- Lead by example. Help normalise the use of face masks in your workplace.
- Consider a workplace face mask policy, particularly for workers in customer-facing roles and for workers who are likely to interact with people at risk of severe illness.
- Consider promoting the use of face masks for workers and visitors during periods of high community prevalence of COVID-19 and/or high levels of workers illness.
- Display information about how to use face masks safely, including changing them every four hours or when soiled/damp, and not reusing single-use surgical masks.

The management of COVID-19 continues to evolve, and as evidence accumulates, advice may be revised. Updates are available at [www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au](http://www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au). If any information in this factsheet is inconsistent with information on that website, please use the information online.