



For more information:
Canada.ca/coronavirus

Information for Indigenous communities:
Canada.ca/coronavirus-Info-Indigenous

COVID-19 UPDATE

March 30, 2020

RE: Use of Surgical Masks in Communities in Response to COVID-19

Dear Chiefs and Health Directors:

We understand that this is a stressful time for everyone, and that people want to do everything they can to protect themselves and their families, and to help stop the spread of COVID-19. As you know, personal protective equipment, including surgical masks, are essential to protect healthcare workers providing care to patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, masks are in short supply and the current demand cannot be met; therefore, appropriate allocation and use of surgical masks is highly encouraged. We have put together some information that may help alleviate concerns for community members, and ensure that all personal protective equipment is being used responsibly and for maximum benefit for everyone in the community.

1. If you do not have symptoms, you do not need to wear a mask

The World Health Organization, Public Health Agency of Canada, and other public health authorities do not recommend the use of surgical masks by healthy/asymptomatic individuals to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Wearing a mask when not sick may give a false sense of security, which can lead to the neglect of essential preventative measures, such as hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

Additionally, there is a potential risk of infection with improper mask use (e.g., frequency of changing the mask) and disposal. Furthermore, the use of masks by healthy individuals directly affects the supply available to health care workers, who require these materials to provide care.

The only circumstances in which the use of a surgical mask is recommended for non-health care workers in the community is for those with COVID-19 who are in close contact with others in the home, when people who have COVID-19 must leave the home for medical attention, and by healthy individuals providing care for a person with COVID-19. In these cases, the use of a surgical mask alone is not sufficient to prevent the spread of illness and should therefore be combined with other infection prevention and control measures.

The provision of masks should be prioritized to health care workers and others providing direct care or services to those infected with COVID-19 to ensure their safety while providing care. It is recommended that health care workers wear a surgical mask when



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entering a room where there are patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. A respirator (e.g., N95) including eye protection should be used when conducting aerosol-generating medical procedures.

2. The best thing you can do is follow public health guidance

All community members should be encouraged to enact individual infection prevention and control measures (e.g., hand hygiene, physical distancing) and adhere to community public health measures (e.g., cancellations of gatherings, avoiding crowding) to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

- **Practice physical distancing:** avoid crowds and large gatherings; try to keep at least two metres away from other people
- **Practice good hygiene:** wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water; avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands; clean areas of your home or office that are touched often with regular household cleaners or diluted bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water)

For additional information on COVID-19 and the appropriate use of personal protective equipment, please refer to the following resources:

- General information on COVID-19: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>
- COVID-19 and Indigenous communities: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1581964230816/1581964277298>
- Community-based measures to mitigate the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/public-health-measures-mitigate-covid-19.html>

Infection prevention and control for coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Interim guidance for acute healthcare settings: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/interim-guidance-acute-healthcare-settings.html#a4.10>