



State of California—Health and Human  
Services Agency  
**California Department of  
Public Health**



November 16, 2020

**TO:** All Californians

**SUBJECT:** Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings

**Note: The following guidance supersedes face coverings guidance released on June 18, 2020. This updated guidance mandates that a face covering is required at all times when outside of the home, with some exceptions.**

## **Background**

The risk for COVID-19 exposure and infection remains and will continue to be in our midst for the foreseeable next several months. Since the start of the pandemic, we have learned a lot about COVID-19 transmission, most notably that there are a large proportion of people who are infected but are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic, and they play an important part in community spread. The use of face coverings by everyone can limit the release of infected droplets when talking, coughing, sneezing, singing, exercising, shouting, or other forms of increased respiration, and they can also reinforce physical distancing by signaling the need to remain apart. In addition, increasing evidence also demonstrates a cloth face covering or mask also offers some protection to the wearer, too.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide information about when face coverings are required. It mandates that face coverings be worn state-wide at all times when outside of the home, unless one or more of the exceptions outlined below apply. It does not substitute for existing guidance about physical distancing and hand hygiene.

## **Guidance**

People in California must wear face coverings when they are outside of the home, unless one of the exemptions below applies.

## **Individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings in the following specific settings:**

- Persons in a car alone or solely with members of their own household.
- Persons who are working in an office or in a room alone.
- Persons who are actively eating or drinking provided that they are able to maintain a distance of at least six feet away from persons who are not members of the same household or residence.
- Persons who are outdoors and maintaining at least 6 feet of social distancing from others not in their household. Such persons must have a face covering with them at all times and must put it on if they are

within 6 feet of others who are not in their household.

- Persons who are obtaining a service involving the nose or face for which temporary removal of the face covering is necessary to perform the service.
- Workers who are required to wear respiratory protection.
- Persons who are specifically exempted from wearing face coverings by other CDPH guidance.

## **The following individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings at all times:**

- Persons younger than two years old. These very young children must not wear a face covering because of the risk of suffocation.
- Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents wearing a face covering. This includes persons with a medical condition for whom wearing a face covering could obstruct breathing or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance. Such conditions are rare.
- Persons who are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- Persons for whom wearing a face covering would create a risk to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

**Note:** Persons exempted from wearing a face covering due to a medical condition who are employed in a job involving regular contact with others must wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it.

### **Additional Information**

## **What is a cloth face covering?**

A cloth face covering is a material that covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with ties or straps or simply wrapped around the lower face. It can be made of a variety of materials, such as cotton, silk, or linen. A cloth face covering may be factory-made or sewn by hand or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels.

## **How should I choose and wear a cloth face covering?**

You should select a face covering that covers your nose and mouth, goes under the chin, and does not have significant gaps around the nose or other parts of the face. Look for face coverings that have three layers, if possible, and are still easy to breathe through. Be sure that the ear loops or ties are tight enough to keep the face covering from sliding down the nose. Always wear your face covering over your nose and mouth, not under your nose or under your chin.

## **How well do cloth face coverings work to prevent spread of COVID-19?**

There is increasing scientific evidence demonstrating that use of face masks or cloth face coverings by the public during this COVID-19 pandemic helps reduce disease transmission. Their primary role is to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes, including someone who has COVID-19

but feels well, as well as reduce exposure for the wearer. Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing, washing hands, and staying home when ill or under quarantine, but they are additive when combined with these primary interventions.

## **When should I wear a cloth face covering?**

You should wear face coverings whenever you are outside of your home, unless one of the exceptions described above applies to you. Individuals who have significant COVID-19 exposure outside of their home, such as in the workplace, should consider wearing a mask at home, especially if vulnerable individuals are part of their household.

## **How should I care for a cloth face covering?**

It's a good idea to wash your cloth face covering frequently, ideally after each use, or at least daily. Have a bag or bin to keep cloth face coverings in until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. If you must re-wear your cloth face covering before washing, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. Discard cloth face coverings that:

- No longer cover the nose and mouth
- Have stretched out or damaged ties or straps
- Cannot stay on the face
- Have holes or tears in the fabric

For additional information and resources regarding masks and face coverings, including types of recommended and not recommended masks, see the [CDC Face Coverings Website](#).

California Department of Public Health  
PO Box, 997377, MS 0500, Sacramento, CA 95899-7377  
Department Website ([cdph.ca.gov](http://cdph.ca.gov))

