



Face Covering FAQs

What is a cloth face covering?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) [define cloth face coverings](#) as fabric coverings including cloth face masks, scarves and bandana coverings, or any homemade face covering made of cotton fabric. The CDC also makes clear that cloth 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
- Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

You can find more information on the [CDC's website](#).

Why should I wear a face covering?

Social distancing and hand washing are effective in slowing the community spread of COVID-19. A cloth face covering may also help to protect others by blocking infectious droplets from spreading when someone with the infection coughs, sneezes or speaks. A significant number of infections may be transmitted by people without symptoms. A mask can prevent transmission by both symptomatic and asymptomatic people.

When do I have to wear a face covering?

You are directed to wear a cloth face covering at outdoor public spaces where you're unable to maintain 6-feet of distance from other people. This means you don't need to wear a face covering when you're outside in your neighborhood walking if you are able to keep 6-feet of distance from others, but you should wear one while at a farmers market or outdoor takeout location. If you believe that you could come within 6-feet of another individual while on a walk, at a park, or in another outdoor setting, wearing a face covering is strongly urged under this Directive.

Everyone is strongly urged to wear face coverings in places such as:

- Stores that sell food and beverages, such as grocery stores, convenience stores, liquor stores, and food banks.
- Retail stores, such as pet supply stores, auto supplies and repair shops, and hardware and home improvement stores.
- Restaurant take-out and food businesses, including the employees who prepare, carry out, and deliver food. Cannabis shops and stores that sell dietary supplements.
- Tobacco and vapor shops.
- Buses and rideshares.

Can businesses decline services to people who are not wearing a mask?

Yes. Businesses are generally allowed to exceed governmental regulations in how they operate, provided that they do so in a way that does not discriminate.

Can local governments decline services to people who are not wearing a mask?

No.

Does this apply to everyone?

No. Some people do not need to follow this directive, including:

- Children ages 2 years and younger. Babies and toddlers under age two should never wear cloth face coverings.
- Children ages 2 to 12 years old. Children in this age group should only wear a face covering if a parent or caregiver supervises to make sure it's worn safely.
- Anyone with a disability that makes it hard for them to wear or remove a face covering.
- Anyone who is deaf and moves their face and mouth to communicate.
- Anyone who has been advised by a medical professional to not wear a face covering because of personal health issues.
- Anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, or unable to remove the face covering without help.

How is this enforced?

We strongly urge people to comply with this Directive because it is an effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19, however, there is no criminal, civil, or financial penalty for failing to wear a face covering in these settings. Violation of this Directive does not create grounds to stop, detain, issue a citation, arrest, or prosecute individuals who do not comply with it.

Law enforcement will not be involved in the enforcement of this directive. This Directive may and should be used to educate, encourage, and persuade individuals to wear face coverings, and we will evaluate if additional steps need to be taken if there is wide-scale non-compliance.

Are employers required to provide masks for their employees?

The State's [Safe Start Plan](#) requires that employers provide the protective gear that is required for their employees to do business.

Why now? You should have been doing this all along!

We first recommended wearing cloth face coverings in public in the beginning of April. The Governor's [Stay Home, Stay Healthy order](#) focused on limiting the spread of COVID-19 by reducing interactions among people who are ill with COVID-19. As public spaces and businesses begin to reopen, we need to use other strategies to reduce the spread. There was

concern that people who use masks might not continue taking other more important steps to prevent transmission, like social distancing.

How long will this directive be in effect?

The Directive will be in effect until the Whatcom County Health Officer determines wearing face coverings in public is no longer required.

What happens if I don't have a mask and have to go out?

Many of us do not happen to have masks lying around. Fortunately, you can use any cloth to create a face cover. A folded bandana or t-shirt can be effective. Watch the CDC's [how-to for homemade cloth face coverings](#).

There is no penalty for not wearing a face covering. Most of us will wear a face covering to keep our neighbors healthy.

Why are you recommending cloth instead of N95s? Aren't N95s more effective?

N95 masks are considered personal protective equipment (PPE) and should be prioritized for healthcare, first responders, and frontline workers. If you have unused N95 masks you would like to donate you can do so through the [Whatcom Unified Command Donations Branch](#).

How do I care for my cloth face covering?

You should wash your face covering after each use. Learn more about how to clean and store cloth face coverings in our [Tips for safe Face Covering Use Infographic](#) (PDF). Also available in [Spanish](#) (PDF) and [Russian](#) (PDF).