



Frequently Asked Questions on Face Coverings

February 12, 2021 (revised from January 21, 2021)

Q. Why do I need to wear a face covering?

A. Covering your face is about protecting other people. By covering your face when you are out in public settings, you are being a good neighbor and helping your community stay healthy.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) can spread between people in close contact – through actions like coughing, sneezing and talking- even when they are not showing symptoms. Wearing a face covering is another step that may help reduce the spread, especially for those who are sick but may not know it.

Face coverings are not a replacement for other evidence-based measures such as [physical distancing](#), [and frequent hand washing practices](#).

Q. When should I wear a face covering?

A. As of November 23rd, face coverings are required in all public indoor settings if there are non-household members present, regardless of the distance away. Face coverings are also required in public outdoor settings if individuals are unable to maintain six feet of social distance with non-household members.

Individuals who have had COVID-19 and/or those that have received the COVID-19 vaccination, should continue to wear a face covering when around non-household members.

Q. Are there exceptions to the face covering requirements?

A. Yes, face coverings do not need to be worn by an individual, worker, customer or patron in public places and business settings who:

- a. Has a medical or behavioral condition or disability and cannot wear a face covering (including, but not limited to, any person who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious or incapacitated, or is otherwise unable to put on or remove the face covering without assistance);
- b. Is under five (5) years of age (please note: as part of the StrongSchoolNC Public Health Toolkit [school guidance](#) public school students in Kindergarten through 12th grade are

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also required to wear face coverings on buses, transportation vehicles, inside school buildings, and on school grounds);

- c. Is actively eating or drinking;
- d. Is swimming;
- e. Is seeking to communicate with someone with hearing loss in a way that requires the mouth to be visible;
- f. Is giving a speech for a broadcast or to an audience;
- g. Is working at home or alone in a vehicle;
- h. Is temporarily removing his or her face covering to secure government or medical services or for identification purposes;
- i. Would be at risk from wearing a face covering at work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines;
- j. Has found that his or her face covering is impeding visibility to operate equipment or a vehicle; or
- k. Is a child whose parent, guardian, or responsible person has been unable to place the face covering safely on the child's face (children under two (2) years of age should not wear a face covering); or
- l. Is a (1) professional or collegiate athlete that is strenuously exercising or recovering from exercise **and** (2) training for or participating in a sport that is under the oversight of a league, association, or other organizer that required teams and players to follow a protocol for reducing risk from COVID-19.

Q. What can I do to ensure my mask is as protective as possible?

A. NCDHHS has additional recommendations to improve mask wearing based on guidance from the CDC. To ensure masks are as protective as possible, NCDHHS recommends that you:

- Make sure your mask fits snugly against your face and covers your nose and mouth. To help with a snug fit, you can use a mask with a metal strip along the top of the mask.
- Use two or more layers for your face covering. You can do this by wearing a cloth face covering with two or more layers or by wearing one disposable mask (sometimes referred to as a surgical mask or a medical procedure mask) underneath a cloth mask.
- Do not wear two disposable masks.
- Make sure you can see and breathe easily.

For additional information on how to improve mask wearing, please see updated guidelines from the [CDC](#).

Q. Do I still need to stay at least six (6) feet away from people if I am wearing a face covering?

A. Yes. Wearing face coverings is an additional public health measure to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It is still recommended that you stay at least six (6) feet away from other people and frequently wash your hands or use hand sanitizer. A face covering is not intended to protect the wearer, but it may prevent the spread of virus from the wearer to others. This is especially important if someone is infected but does not have symptoms.

Q. Do I need to wear a face covering while exercising indoors?

A. Yes. Face coverings are REQUIRED while exercising indoors unless an exception applies. Exceptions include:

- One of the exceptions previously listed above, such as a medical or behavioral condition.
- If you have symptoms while strenuously exercising such as trouble breathing, dizziness, or lightheadedness;
- If you are wearing equipment like a mouthguard or helmet and are having trouble breathing;
- If you are doing any activity in which the face covering could become entangled and a choking hazard or impair vision in high risk activities such as gymnastics, cheerleading, or tumbling; or
- If you are doing activities that may cause the face covering to become wet, like when swimming or other activities in a pool, lake, water attraction, or similar body of water.

Q. Do I need to wear a face covering while exercising outdoors?

A. Yes. Face coverings are **REQUIRED** while exercising outdoors *and* within 6 feet of someone who does not reside in the individual's household, unless one of the exceptions above apply. However, if you are able to safely maintain at least 6 feet distance from others, you don't need to wear a face covering.

Q. Should children wear face coverings?

A. Yes. Children five years or older are **REQUIRED** to wear a face covering. Children over the age of 2 should wear face coverings if they can reliably wear, remove, and handle face coverings throughout the day. Face coverings should NOT be put on babies and children under the age of 2 because of danger of suffocation.

Parents and caregivers should make sure that the face coverings fit their children properly, and provide children frequent reminders, and education on the importance and proper way to wear face coverings.

Q. What kind of face covering should I use?

A. People should wear face coverings that cover the nose and mouth. N95 respirators are not recommended for general public use or use in community settings, as these should be reserved for specific high-risk occupational settings, healthcare providers and other medical first responders in a health care setting. Based on recommendations from the CDC, face shields do not meet the requirements for face coverings.

Q. Where can I get a face covering?

A. While face coverings are being sold by a range of retailers and available to purchase online, you can also make them at home from regular household items. CDC has released [resources](#) on how to make a face covering from items like bandanas and t-shirts. A [video](#) showing the steps is also available.

Q. How do I take care of my face covering?

A. It is a good idea to wash your face covering frequently, ideally after each use, or at least daily. Have a bag or bin to keep 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 face covering before washing, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. Discard 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

Q. How do I safely adjust or remove a used face covering?

A. Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing or adjusting a face covering and wash hands immediately after removing or adjusting.

Q. What if I am worried about being profiled or being subjected to bias if I wear a face covering?

A. Some populations may experience increased anxiety and fear of bias and being profiled wearing face coverings in public spaces, but everyone should adhere to this guidance without fear of profiling or bias. If someone is the target of ethnic or racial intimidation as the result of adhering to the face covering provision or as a result of the pandemic, they are encouraged to report the matter to law enforcement or other government entity.

Q. What if I am a person with, or I support someone with a disability and cannot or simply will not wear a face covering?

A. It may be scary for individuals to have coverings placed over their face if they do not understand why or if they have trouble with breathing. Some individuals may have sensitivity to having something placed over their face. Providing clear education about the reasons to wear a face covering, giving encouragement, and modeling the use of a face covering are good rules of thumb when helping someone. It may also be helpful to practice wearing a face covering for short time periods or limiting the amount of time it is worn. If an individual is unable to wear a face covering or will not tolerate using a face covering, it may be necessary to use a scarf or other wrap. A person should not be forced to use a face covering, but, instead, other steps should be taken to help the individual avoid unnecessary exposure.

Q. What if I am a person with hearing loss and am concerned about not being able to read lips?

A. Deaf and Hard of Hearing people often use lipreading to help understand what those around them are saying. Without being able to lipread, other communication techniques need to be used to help with communication. Some solutions to improve communication include: find a face covering that has a clear plastic area that allows the lips to be visible (there are a number of options out there), increase

your distance, write notes back and forth, write on a white board to communicate, use a free speech to text app on your mobile device and allow the person to read what you speak, gesture and if needed step several additional feet back from the person and remove your face covering just long enough to communicate.

Q. How well do face coverings work to prevent spread of COVID-19?

A. Scientific evidence suggests that use of face coverings by the public during a pandemic can help reduce disease transmission. Face coverings can reduce the release of infectious particles into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes. Face coverings are not a substitute for staying six (6) feet apart, washing hands, and staying home when ill.

Q. If I am alone in my workplace or office, am I required to wear a face covering?

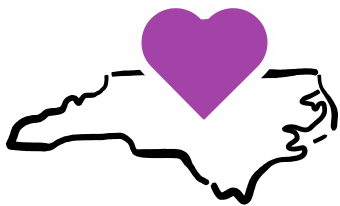
A. In general, everyone must wear a face covering in indoor public settings when they are around non-household members, and outdoors when individuals are unable to maintain consistent physical distance of six feet. However, if a person is working alone in a space and has no expectation of interacting with another person, they do not need to wear a face covering. Examples of “working alone” include a lone worker in an office with a door and four walls, or a lone worker in a warehouse who has no anticipated contact with others.

Q. When I am dining in at a restaurant, may I remove my face covering once I am seated at the table?

A. Face coverings are required at all times when the individual is not eating or drinking.

Q. What is the penalty for violating the face covering requirement?

A. These requirements are enforceable against individuals and businesses who do not follow the face covering requirements. Penalty for violating the requirements is a Class 2 misdemeanor, which could result in a fine of up to \$1,000 or active punishment.



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