



Requirements for the Use of Face Coverings and Masks March 29, 2021

North Carolina took early and aggressive action to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our state. These actions prevented our healthcare systems from being overwhelmed and provided valuable time to build our state's capacity to respond to this crisis. Now, we are seeing increasing cases and hospitalizations from COVID-19 across our state. With more North Carolinians leaving their homes as we ease restrictions, the risk for COVID-19 exposure and infection increases.

We have important goals: to protect our families, friends and neighbors from getting seriously ill, to restore our economy and get people back to work, and to get our children back to school. To attain these goals, we must remain vigilant and continue to work together to combat the spread of COVID-19 by taking preventive actions to slow the spread of COVID-19. The preventive actions include the 3 Ws: ***Wear a cloth face covering. Wait 6 feet apart from others. Wash your hands.***

Over the past few months, we have learned a lot about COVID-19 transmission. We know now that people who are infected, but do not have symptoms, can infect others by spreading respiratory droplets through activities like speaking, coughing, laughing, and singing. New scientific evidence suggests that public use of face coverings can help reduce disease transmission. Face coverings are not a substitute for other important prevention practices and should be used **in addition** to staying 6 feet apart, washing hands, and staying home when ill.

This document updates existing NC DHHS guidance for the use of face coverings by the general public when outside the home. It mandates that face coverings be worn statewide as outlined below. It is not a substitute for existing guidance about social distancing and handwashing.

Guidance for People

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, unless an exception applies. Face coverings are also required in public outdoor settings if individuals are unable to maintain six feet of social distance with non-household members.

Exceptions. 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);

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- b. Is under five (5) years of age (please see StrongSchoolNC Public Health Toolkit [school guidance](#) for requirement for requirements for K-12 school settings);
- 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;
- 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.

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](#).

Guidance for Businesses

Businesses are required to have patrons and employees wear face coverings whether they are inside or outside unless an exception applies.

Employers who have workers who perform work outside of their home in North Carolina and have not already provided face coverings for their workers shall make good-faith efforts to provide a one-week supply of reusable Face Coverings or a new disposable face covering daily as soon as possible for workers to use at their place of employment. New face coverings should be provided during the workday if the worker's face covering becomes soiled, torn or wet.

Guidance for Face Coverings and Exercise

All workers and guests are required to wear face coverings when they are inside a fitness or recreation establishment, regardless of whether they are exercising. All individuals are required to wear a face covering if:

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- Outdoors and within six feet of someone who does not reside in the individual's household; or
- Indoors and not within their own home; or
- Indoors at home and within six feet of someone who does not reside in the individual's household.

However, people need not wear a face covering while exercising if:

- 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.

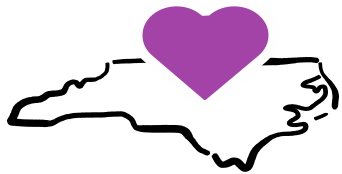
Guidance for Schools

All adults (workers, teachers, guests, other adults) and children five (5) years and older at public and non-public schools in North Carolina are required to wear a face covering:

- When outdoors and within 6 feet of another person, unless an exception applies;
- When indoors, at all times unless an exception applies.

For more information on school guidance please refer to [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit](#) and [StrongSchools NC Non-public Health Toolkit](#).

For Frequently Asked Questions, please review the face covering [FAQ](#).



#StayStrongNC

**Staying apart brings us together.
Protect your family and neighbors.**

Learn more at nc.gov/covid19.



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