

Continuous Masking: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why is this a requirement now, compared to 5 months ago when we first learned about the risks of COVID-19?

A: The use of masks in health and social services facilities and buildings is being adopted as a preventative and precautionary measure to ensure the safety of employees and the public. Since COVID-19 is still present in Canada and asymptomatic spread is still a concern, the risk of COVID-19 spreading is still present.

Increased movement and contact as people continue to travel equates to an increased risk of infections and outbreaks. As more staff return to office spaces, children return to school, and businesses and public spaces open, the risk goes up.

Q: Why can't this wait until there is an active case of COVID-19 in the NWT?

A: Wearing a non-medical mask in public places is a recommendation of the Chief Public Health officer.

Due to a combination of current testing capacity and the possibility of asymptomatic transmission, there is the potential COVID-19 could spread for several days before a case is confirmed. Having these measures in place will ensure that if COVID-19 does enter the territory, the spread will be stopped or slowed. We are also implementing this now for the following reasons:

- Despite the duration of time since the last confirmed case of COVID-19 in the NWT, public health experts and epidemiologists are still predicting that a second, potentially more serious wave of COVID-19 is likely to occur before the end of the year.
- Our care facilities often have people present that are immunocompromised or at higher risk of severe outcomes if they contract COVID-19. By wearing a mask in our facilities you can protect these people.
- By wearing a mask as a patient, you help protect other patients, health and social services workers, and the community as a whole.
- Staff that work in health and social services face increased risk because of the volume of people they provide care to. If a healthcare

worker contracts COVID-19 or becomes sick, that impacts their ability to work and for patients and clients to receive care and services.

Q: If I have an appointment, will I be required to bring my own mask?

A: If you have an appointment or meeting at one of our facilities or offices (including long term care homes or long term care facilities), please bring your own mask. We encourage individuals to bring their own mask as our supplies are limited; however, if you do not have your own mask, our staff can provide you with a non-medical mask.

Individuals with respiratory issues may be given a medical-grade mask, to ensure increased protection when they are visiting our facilities.

Q: Do Health and Social Services staff also have to wear masks?

A: Yes. If an employee works within 2 meters of the public, they are required to wear a mask; the mask will either be a cloth/non-medical mask, or a medical mask. Which type of mask they will be wearing has been decided based on an occupational health and safety assessment that was completed in each of our offices and workspaces. The risk assessments looked at things like:

- What type of service the employee provides,
- How close of proximity the employee will be to other employees or the public,
- If the employee will be spending extended periods of time in close contact with others, and
- Whether or not it is possible for the employee to physically distance themselves or use a physical barrier as a precaution.

These new masking requirements will be in place in all of our facilities and offices by mid-September, some facilities may be implementing this for staff as early as August 31, 2020.

Q: What if I am unable to wear a mask for a medical reason? Do I need a medical note to prove that I'm unfit to wear a mask?

A: While medical reasons which might prevent someone from wearing a mask safely are rare, you will not be required to wear a mask if you have medical reasons that makes it unsafe for you to wear a mask.

Children under 2 years old will not be required to wear a mask, nor will persons with dementia, developmental or cognitive delays, severe psychiatric condition, severe skin conditions, or anyone who is physically unable to put on or take off a mask.

You do not need a medical note to prove that you are not fit to wear a mask.

Q: Will I be denied service if I decline to wear a mask or do not have a mask?

A: We will not refuse to provide you service if you do not have a mask on, we are asking you to wear one to protect our staff and our communities. Wearing a mask is a very reasonable and easy way to protect both yourself and others, and is in alignment with the recommendations by the NWT's Chief Public Health Officer, Health Canada, and the World Health Organization.

If you have a mask, please bring your own. If you do not have your own mask, our staff can provide you with a non-medical mask at the entrance of our facility. You will not be required to wear a mask if you have medical reasons that make it unsafe for you to wear a mask.

Q: Is it proven that wearing a cloth mask can decrease the spread of COVID-19? If so, why are you only requiring this now?

A: According to the Public Health Agency of Canada states there is evidence that transmission of the virus can happen from infected people before they develop symptoms (pre-symptomatic transmission) or from infected people that never develop symptoms (asymptomatic transmission). Evidence shows that:

- Wearing a non-medical mask or facial covering can be effective in protecting others around you, and
- Wearing a non-medical mask can prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating others or landing on surfaces

The World Health Organization also supports the use of fabric or non-medical masks, for source control, meaning it is effective in protecting those around

you if you are the source of COVID-19. [Click here](#) to view various videos they have released, explaining the benefit of non-medical masking.

Q: What if I am undergoing a procedure that requires the care provider to look in my mouth?

A: If your provider needs you to remove your mask, they will ask you to do so and the provider will continue to wear their own mask.

Q: How will you enforce the use of masks?

A: Screening stations are set up at the entrance of all of our facilities. At these stations, staff will inform the public that they must wear their mask. If you do not have your own mask but need to enter the facility for an appointment, they can provide you with a mask.

Wearing a mask is a very reasonable and easy way to protect both yourself and others. We will not have people in our facilities that are specifically tasked with enforcing mask wearing, and are asking people to follow this guideline because it's the right thing to do.