

# Updated Order of the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Requiring Universal Face Coverings

## Frequently Asked Questions

November 17, 2020

**Why did the Secretary re-issue this Order?**The Secretary re-issued this Order to continue to protect all people in the Commonwealth from the spread of COVID-19.

**What type of mask complies with this Order?**The Order requires individuals to wear a "face covering." "Face covering" means covering of the nose and mouth with material that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is wrapped around the lower face. A "face covering" can be made of a variety of synthetic or natural fabrics, including cotton, silk or linen. A "face covering" may be factory-made,

[sewn by hand, or be improvised from household items](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-make-cloth-h-face-covering.html) 

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, including, but not limited to, scarfs, bandanas, t-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels.

While procedural and surgical masks intended for health care providers and first responders, such as N95 respirators, meet those requirements, these specialized masks should be reserved for appropriate occupational and health care settings.

**Does a disposable face shield suffice in lieu of a mask?**Wearing a cloth face covering is best. A disposable face shield is considered an alternative to a face covering and may be worn when wearing a face covering is otherwise not possible.

**Does the Order apply to individuals within local government facilities, including court houses and government buildings?**Yes. The Order does apply to individuals inside and outside of local government facilities, court houses, and other government buildings.

**What happens if I don't wear a mask?**The wearing of a face covering, such as a mask, helps us as a society to limit the spread of COVID-19 and successfully combat this pandemic; therefore, it is in everyone's best interest that all Pennsylvanians comply with this Order.

As this is a legal Order under the Disease Prevention and Control Law, law enforcement officers are authorized to issue warnings or citations to anyone who does not comply with the Order. The Department of Health can also issue warnings and citations to businesses, persons, facilities, and organizations that do not comply.

**Should I report someone not wearing a mask? If so, how do I report them?** Individuals should be cautious about reporting individuals who are not wearing a face covering, such as a mask, as individuals may fall under one of the exemptions (including having a medical condition that would excuse them from having to wear a face covering). However, if there is a legitimate concern about a situation of non-compliance with the Order, local law enforcement agencies can be contacted through their non-emergency phone numbers to investigate issues of compliance. Individuals should not confront anyone who is not wearing a face covering, take enforcement matters into their own hands, or put themselves in a dangerous situation.

**If I'm inside a public place and can maintain physical distancing, do I need to wear a mask?**

Yes. When indoors, individuals must wear a face covering, irrespective of physical distance. If a person is working alone and does not expect to have any interaction with another person, they may remove their face covering.

**Do I have to wear a mask if alone in my workplace or office?** Everyone must wear a face covering when indoors, irrespective of physical distance, however, if a person is working alone, and has no expectation of being around other persons, they do not need to do so.

**What does "working alone" mean?** "Working alone" means when a person is separated from interaction with other people with little or no expectation of in-person interruption. Examples include:

- A lone worker inside the enclosed cab of a crane or construction equipment.
- A lone worker inside an office with four walls and a door.
- A lone worker inside a cubicle with 3 walls and a door or entryway, where walls are high enough to block the breathing zone of all people walking by, and the worker's activity will not require anyone to come inside that person's workspace.
- A person who is alone in an agricultural field or other open area with no expected contact with others.

**Does the masking requirement apply to workers who are outdoors, and who engage in heavy physical activity, such as employees of solid waste companies and landscapers?** Yes.

Individuals must wear a face covering unless working alone or working solely with individuals who are a part of their household. A list of the exceptions can be found in Section 3 of the Order.

**Do I have to wear a mask both inside and outside?**The Order requires individuals to wear a face covering when indoors, irrespective of physical distance. When outdoors, one must wear a face covering when with others who are not members of the person's household and unable to maintain sustained physical distance.

Sustained physical distance means the practice of staying at least six feet away from others to avoid becoming a

[close contact](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact)  (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact) . On

October 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its definition of close contact to "someone who was within six feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period." The guidance goes on to note that there are additional factors to consider when defining "close contact." DOH recommends using 15 consecutive minutes of exposure at a distance of six feet or less as an operational definition for "close contact." However, there are circumstances when someone should be considered a close contact of a case after being within six feet for fewer than 15 consecutive minutes. Additional factors that should be considered when assessing close contacts include but are not limited to close proximity to an infected person, infected person exhibiting symptoms, and environmental conditions like crowds or inadequate ventilation.

**Do I need to wear a mask when around my family members or at a friend's house?**Yes. A face covering is required when indoors and around persons who are not part of the same household. For example, if you are a part of a family of four who is hosting a dinner with extended family, friends or neighbors, all attendees must wear face coverings. If having dinner with just the persons who reside in the same home as you, you do not need to wear face coverings. If outdoors and able to maintain sustained physical distance, face coverings are recommended, but not required.

**Do I have to wear a mask at a restaurant, bar, or private club?**Yes, individuals who are seated at a restaurant or other establishment that offers food and beverage service need to wear a face covering when not eating or drinking.

**Do I have to wear a mask at a house of worship such as a church, synagogue or mosque?**Yes, individuals must wear a face covering inside any public place as well as outdoors when they cannot maintain sustained physical distance from those who are not members of their household.

**Are masks required while driving for work?** Persons must wear a face covering when waiting in a public area for, riding on, driving or operating public transportation or paratransit or while in a taxi, private car service or ride-sharing vehicle. If the person is driving alone or only with members of their household throughout the trip, no face covering, such as a mask, is needed in the vehicle; however, should they need to travel through a drive thru where other persons are present and cannot maintain sustained physical distance, they must wear a face covering.

**Does my ride-share vehicle driver and non-household ride-share vehicle passenger need to wear a mask?** Yes. Persons must wear a face covering when waiting in a public place for, riding on, driving or operating public transportation or paratransit or while in a taxi, private car service or ride-sharing vehicle.

**Does this Order apply to residents in Long-Term Care Facilities or other congregate care settings?** Residents of long-term care facilities, hospitals, correctional settings or other congregate care settings should follow any face covering guidance issued by the Department or agency that regulates those facilities.

**Is it acceptable to remove face coverings when high temperatures and humidity may create unsafe conditions, or simply if the weather is very warm?** Individuals must wear face coverings unless wearing a face covering would create an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines. Mere discomfort is not considered a risk to an individual's health or safety. Face shields may be considered an alternative if wearing a cloth face covering is otherwise not possible.

**I have asthma or another medical condition. Do I have to wear a mask?** Individuals must wear a face covering unless they meet one of the exceptions in Section 3 of the Order. Persons, including children, with sensory sensitivities may have challenges wearing a cloth face covering. They should consult with their health care provider for advice about an appropriate alternative.

**When does my child have to wear a mask?** Children two years old and older are required to wear a face covering as required by the Order, unless they qualify for one of the exceptions in Section 3 of the Order. If a child is outdoors and able to consistently maintain a social distance of at least six feet from individuals who are not a part of their household, they do not need to wear a face covering.

If a parent, guardian, or responsible person is unable to place a face covering safely on the child's face, they should not do so. If a child two years old or older is unable to remove a face covering without assistance, the child is not required to wear one.

**Do staff and children in childcare facilities need to wear face coverings?**All staff and children two years old and older must wear face coverings during childcare operations.

Any child who cannot wear a face covering due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability, and children who would be unable to remove a face covering without assistance, are not required to wear face coverings.

Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or who has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication, also are not required to wear a face covering. Alternative face coverings, such as plastic face shields, may also accommodate such disabilities.

**Does the Order apply to children and adults while in schools?**Yes, the Order applies to all students, staff and visitors two years old and older while in school entities, including public K-12 schools, brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers (CTCs), intermediate units (IUs); educational programming for students in non-educational placements such as residential settings (boarding schools), residential facilities, detention centers, and hospital settings; PA Pre-K Counts, Head Start Programs and Preschool Early Intervention programs; Private Academic Nursery Schools and locally funded prekindergarten activities; and post-secondary institutions.

For the safety of students, staff and families and to avoid community spread of COVID-19, students and staff are considered to be members of the public who are congregating in indoor locations. As such, they are required to adhere to the Order.

**Does the updated Order apply to all children?**The updated order applies to all children two years old and older.

**Under what circumstances are students permitted to remove their face coverings?**School entities may allow students to remove face coverings when students are:

- Eating or drinking when spaced at least six feet apart; or
- When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task; or
- At least six feet apart during "face-covering breaks" to last no longer than 10 minutes.

**Do students with disabilities need to wear face coverings?** Children two years old and older are required to wear a face covering unless they have a medical or mental health condition or disability, documented in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), that precludes the wearing of a face covering in school. Accommodations for such students should be made in partnership with the student's health care provider, school nurse, and Individual Education Plan (IEP)/Section 504 team.

**Do I need to wear a mask while walking my dog? Going for a run in the park?** If doing an outdoor solitary activity outside that is not likely to result in being within six feet of another person, you are not required to wear a face covering. Individuals should consider carrying a face covering in case they unexpectedly come within six feet of others for longer than 15 minutes.

**Does the Order require individuals to wear masks when participating in indoor physical activity?** Yes, a person must wear a face covering when participating in indoor physical activity where another person or persons who are not members of the individual's household are present in the same space, irrespective of physical distance. Face coverings need not be worn if the person meets one of the exceptions in Section 3 of the Order.

**Does the Order apply to athletes and sports activities?** Yes. Everyone who participates in sport activities including coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear a face covering, such as a mask, unless they fall under an exception in Section 3 of the Order.

**Indoors:** Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings, when indoors and where another person or persons who are not members of the individual's household are present in the same space, irrespective of physical distance. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, etc.

**Outdoors:** Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings if they cannot maintain sustained physical distance from persons outside of their household. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc. If sustained six-foot distancing can be maintained, face coverings may be removed when outdoors.

**Can employers make a "no exceptions" or a stricter face covering policy than the Commonwealth?** Yes. An employer that does so will have to review relevant state and Federal employment laws and determine that they are acting within the bounds of those laws.

### **Can schools make a "no exceptions" or a stricter face covering policy than the**

**Commonwealth?** Yes, a school entity may make a stricter face covering policy. However, reasonable accommodations must be made for students, staff, employees and visitors who state they have a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that makes it unreasonable for the person to maintain a face covering. .

### **The Order says businesses and schools must take "reasonable steps" to enforce the masking requirement. What are "reasonable steps"?**

To decide what steps are reasonable, a business or school entity should consider the size and structure of the business or school, resources, levels of supervision, numbers of customers and staff, workplace culture and any history of discrimination or harassment in the workplace. What is reasonable for a large corporation or school may not be reasonable for a small business or school. Reasonable steps may include developing and implementing a policy, training staff on conflict management, and monitoring and taking corrective actions in instances of noncompliance among staff, students, customers or visitors.

### **The Order says businesses and schools must provide "reasonable accommodations" what does that mean?**

Businesses should consult with legal counsel to determine reasonable accommodations.

### **Can a business deny entry to a customer who is not wearing a face covering?**

Yes, if a customer is not wearing a face covering a business should deny entry; however, that business must offer a reasonable accommodation for the customer to purchase goods. State and Federal law, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), may also create obligations for businesses or employers. Businesses should talk to their legal representatives for specific advice.

### **Can a business deny entry to an employee who is not wearing a face covering?**

All employees must wear a face covering, such as a mask in the workplace unless they qualify for an exception in Section 3 of the Order. The administration does not dictate to employers how they should manage their workforce; however, employers should follow all applicable laws including the ADA and consult with their legal representatives for legal advice.

### **Can a business deny entry and not provide a reasonable accommodation?**

Businesses should seek advice from their legal counsel regarding whether reasonable accommodations must be offered.

**The Order says, "Mitigate or eliminate employee, teacher, student and customer exposure to people who cannot wear or refuse to wear a face covering." What does that mean?** If a business or school has an employee, teacher, student, or customer who cannot wear a face covering, the business should employ additional mitigation efforts to keep their staff safe such as providing Plexiglas shields, offering services outdoors, or additional physical distancing opportunities.

**The Order no longer says, "Individuals are not required to show documentation that an exception applies." Does that mean a business can ask me for a medical excuse? Can my employer now require me to provide proof of a medical condition?** Exemptions from the Order can be found in Section 3 of the Order. When a customer or visitor claims to be exempt due to a medical or mental health condition or disability, businesses may not require proof of the condition or disability or require customers or visitors to explain the nature of their condition.

**When will I be required to follow the terms of this Order, and for how long?** The updated Order is effective immediately and will remain in effect until the Secretary of Health determines the public health risk is sufficiently reduced so that face coverings are no longer necessary as a widely utilized public health tool.