

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the  
Elkhart County Health Department  
Guidance on Wearing Face Coverings  
Issued June 12, 2020

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## Answers

### 1. How does a face covering prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Answer: One of the primary ways that the COVID-19 virus spreads is by respiratory droplets that people expel when they breathe, speak, sing, cough, or sneeze. COVID-19 can be spread by individuals that do not realize they are infected. Some symptomatic individuals have such minor symptoms that they do not realize they are infected with COVID-19. People infected with the virus are also contagious 48 hours before developing symptoms, the time when they are pre-symptomatic. Additionally, some people infected with the virus may not have any symptoms, meaning they are asymptomatic, but they may still be contagious. Therefore, the Center for Disease Control, Indiana State Department of Health, and Elkhart County Health Department now believe that wearing a face covering may reduce the risk of transmitting the coronavirus when in public by reducing the spread of respiratory droplets.

### 2. If I wear a face covering when in public or private settings with people outside my household, do I still need to practice social distancing?

Answer: Yes, social distancing remains one of the most important tools to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Wearing a face covering is another important tool for reducing the spread of the virus. However, wearing a face covering is not a substitute for physical distancing of at least 6 feet, frequent hand washing, and the use of other protective measures.

### 3. When does the Guidance take effect?

Answer: The Guidance took effect immediately upon its issuance.

### 4. When does the Guidance end?

Answer: The Guidance does not have an end date. The Guidance may be terminated or amended in the future by written declaration of the Elkhart County Health Officer.

**5. Since the Guidance was issued by the County Health Officer, does it also apply to cities in the County?**

Answer: Yes. The County Health Officer has the authority to issue orders and guidance for the county as a whole, including the unincorporated county and all cities in the county.

**6. What exactly is considered a face covering?**

Answer: As used in this Guidance, a “face covering” means a covering made of cloth, fabric, or other soft or permeable material, without holes, that covers only the nose and mouth and surrounding areas of the lower face. A covering that hides or obscures the wearer’s eyes or forehead is not a face covering.

**7. What are some examples of face coverings?**

Answer: Examples of face coverings include a scarf or bandana; a neck gaiter; a homemade covering made from a T-shirt, sweatshirt, or towel, held on with rubber bands, hair ties, or other materials; or a mask, which need not be medical-grade. A face covering may be factory-made, or may be handmade and created from ordinary household materials. The face covering should be comfortable, so that the wearer can breathe comfortably through the nose without need for frequent adjustment, so as to avoid touching the face.

**8. Should I use a surgical or procedure mask to cover my face, like the masks I see at health care facilities?**

Answer: For as long as medical grade masks such as N95 masks and surgical masks are in short supply, members of the public should not purchase those masks as face coverings under this Guidance. Unless necessary for medical reasons, medical grade masks should be reserved for health care providers and first responders.

**9. I am required to wear an N95 face covering as a part of my job (i.e. first responder). Are you suggesting that I switch to a cloth face covering?**

Answer: No, if you are required to wear a special type of face covering (i.e. N95), then you should follow the guidelines and protocols in place for that type of face covering.

**10. Can I clean my face covering and reuse it?**

Answer: Yes, if your face covering is made of cloth and is not a disposable mask it should be cleaned every day it is used. You should have extra face coverings available so that you have a clean and completely dry one available for use. Many face coverings can be washed at home.

## **11. How do I clean a cloth face covering?**

Answer: A face covering can be cleaned by either of the following techniques:

### **Washing machine**

- You can include your face covering with your regular laundry.
- Use regular laundry detergent and the warmest appropriate water setting for the cloth used to make the face covering.

### **Washing by hand**

- Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
  - 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) household bleach per gallon of room temperature water or
  - 4 teaspoons household bleach per quart of room temperature water
- Check the label to see if your bleach is intended for disinfection. Some bleach products, such as those designed for safe use on colored clothing, may not be suitable for disinfection. Ensure the bleach product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.
- Soak the face covering in the bleach solution for 5 minutes.
- Rinse thoroughly with cool or room temperature water.

After cleaning a face covering, you must ensure the face covering is completely dry before using it again.

## **12. I have a mask that has a valve on it. Should I use that as a face covering?**

Answer: No. Any mask that has a one-way valve, which looks like a raised plastic cylinder about the size of a quarter on the front or side of the mask allows droplets from the person wearing them to escape and enter the air. Use of masks with valves does not protect others from exposure to droplets that could contain the virus.

## **13. How do I make a face covering?**

Answer: Descriptions of how to make a face covering may be found at the website of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-make-cloth-face-covering.html> and a demonstration by the US Surgeon General can be found at <https://youtu.be/tPx1yqvJgf4>.

## **14. When should I discard a cloth face covering?**

Answer: A cloth face covering should be discarded any time the face covering:

- no longer covers your nose and mouth appropriately;

- has stretched out and no longer fits appropriately;
- cannot stay securely on your face;
- has holes or tears in the fabric; or
- is in a worn condition that otherwise allows respiratory droplets to exit the face covering.

**15. How should I put on and remove my face covering?**

Answer: You should always handle the face covering by touching the strings or ear loops only. Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when handling a face covering. Be careful not to touch the outside or inside of the cloth face covering when putting it on, wearing it, or removing it from your face. If you touch the outside or inside of the cloth face covering, immediately wash your hands for at least 20 seconds. A face covering should never be worn damp or wet.

**16. Because of my job, the Governor’s Executive Order requires me to wear a face covering. Does this Guidance mean I don’t have to wear a face covering?**

Answer: No, the Elkhart County Health Department can only be more restrictive than the Governor’s Executive Order. If the Governor’s Executive Order mandates that you wear a face covering in specific circumstances, then you must wear the face covering in those circumstances.

**17. When should the general public wear a face covering?**

Answer: Unless an exception set forth in the Guidance applies, every individual should properly wear a face covering over their nose and mouth when they are at:

1. an indoor area open to the public, including public transportation;
2. an outdoor public area where a distance of 6 feet from individuals outside of their household cannot be maintained; or
3. a private indoor or outdoor area where a distance of 6 feet from individuals outside of their household cannot be maintained.

**18. Should public transportation operators and car service drivers cover their faces?**

Answer: Yes, they should. Each driver or operator of any public transportation vehicle, paratransit vehicle, taxi, private car service or ride-sharing vehicle should wear a face covering while driving or operating such vehicle, regardless of whether a member of the public is in the vehicle. This is because drivers need to reduce the spread of their respiratory droplets in the vehicle at all times so the riders are not exposed to the driver’s respiratory droplets. As a reminder, a face covering should not impair the user’s visibility or line of sight as it should only cover their mouth and nose (not their eyes).

**19. Should employers strongly encourage or require employees to wear face coverings?**

Answer: Yes, in some cases employers must require their employees to wear a face covering as set forth in the Governor's Executive Orders. As for all other employees, all employers should strongly encourage or require their employees, contractors, owners, and volunteers to wear a face covering at the workplace and when performing work off-site any time the employee, contractor, owner, or volunteer is:

- i. interacting in person with any member of the public;
- ii. working in any space visited by members of the public, such as, by way of example and without limitation, reception areas, grocery store or pharmacy aisles, service counters, public restrooms, cashier and checkout areas, waiting rooms, service areas, and other spaces used to interact with the public, regardless of whether anyone from the public is present at the time;
- iii. working in any space where food is prepared or packaged for sale or distribution to others;
- iv. working in or walking through common areas such as hallways, stairways, elevators, and parking facilities;
- v. in any other indoor area open to the public, including public transportation;
- vi. in an outdoor public area where a distance of 6 feet from individuals outside of their household cannot be maintained; or
- vii. in a private indoor or outdoor area where a distance of 6 feet from individuals outside of their household cannot be maintained.

**20. Are there some employees that do not need to cover their face while working inside?**

Answer: Yes, but only under certain circumstances. In Elkhart County, a face covering is not required, unless required by the Governor's Executive Orders, when a person is in a personal office (a single room) when others outside of that person's household are not present as long as the public does not have open access (i.e. without an appointment) to visit the room. By way of example and without limitation, a construction worker, tradesman, manager, accountant, or office worker, who is otherwise allowed to engage in work pursuant to the Governor's Executive Orders, is not required to wear a face covering if that individual is alone and in a space not regularly visited by the public, but that individual must put on a face covering when coworkers enter and cannot maintain a 6 foot distance, when being visited by a client/customer, and anywhere members of the public or other coworkers are regularly present.

**21. Are there some employees that do not need to cover their face while working outside?**

Answer: Yes, but only under certain circumstances. In Elkhart County, a face covering is not required, unless required by the Governor's Executive Orders, when a person is working outside and can maintain at all times a distance of 6 feet from all individuals outside of their household.

**22. What actions should employers take to encourage customers to wear a face covering?**

Answer: Employers should update their COVID-19 continued operations plan, currently required under Section 5.b of Executive Order 20-32, to strongly encourage or require customers to wear face coverings. Additionally, employers should take reasonable measures, such as posting signs, to remind their customers and the public of their COVID-19 plan requirements and the importance of wearing a face covering while inside of or waiting in line to enter the business, facility, or location.

**23. If I don't cover my face at a business, could the business refuse to serve me?**

Answer: Yes, entities and organizations may require that all customers entering the building wear a face covering. In that circumstance, the entity should take all reasonable steps to prohibit any member of the public who is not wearing a face covering, without an exception set forth in the Guidance, from entering and should not serve that person. For individuals that qualify for an exception under the Guidance, the entity may provide alternative means for shopping at the location (i.e. curb side pick-up) in lieu of allowing the individual to enter the building.

**24. Do infants and toddlers need to wear face coverings?**

Answer: The Guidance states that any child aged two years or less should NOT wear a face covering because of the risk of suffocation.

**25. Do children need to wear face coverings?**

Answer: This Guidance strongly encourages that any child 3 years and older should wear a face covering and that those ages 3 to 12 should have adult supervisions to avoid misuse by the child.

**26. Should people who walk, run, and cycle outdoors wear a face covering?**

Answer: Wearing a face covering is strongly recommended any time an individual is outside in an area where they are unable to continuously maintain a 6 foot distance from all people outside of their household (i.e. running past others on a narrow sidewalk). But wearing the face covering during such activity does not change the fact that everyone must still comply with social distancing requirements including maintaining at least 6 feet of separation from all

people outside of their household to the greatest extent possible (i.e. no running side by side with your friend from a different household).

In many circumstances, an individual engaged in individual outdoor recreational activity (i.e. running; cycling) may have limited circumstances where they are near other individuals during a long distance outing. In this circumstance the individual may simply bring a face covering and wear that face covering in circumstances where at least a 6 foot separation cannot be maintained, and thus they carry the face covering in a readily accessible location.

Running or bicycling causes people to more forcefully expel airborne particles which makes the usual minimum 6 feet distance requirement less adequate. Therefore, runners and cyclists should take extra measures to avoid exposing others to airborne particles, including wearing a face covering when possible, maintaining physical distance of greater than 6 feet when engaging in these activities, avoiding spitting, and avoiding running or cycling directly in front of or behind another runner or cyclist who is not in the same household.

**27. Are there any situations where a person does not need to wear a face covering?**

Answer: Yes, under certain circumstances. For example, a Face Mask is not needed when driving a personal vehicle alone or when you are in the exclusive presence of members of your household. The Guidance also recognizes that the following individuals do not need to wear a face covering:

1. any child aged two years or less (a face covering may cause such a child to suffocate);
2. any individual who has a physical disability that prevents easily wearing or removing a face covering;
3. any individual who is deaf and needs to remove the face covering to use facial and mouth movements as a part of their communication;
4. any individual who has been advised by medical professional that wearing a face covering may pose a risk to the person wearing the mask for health related reasons;
5. any individual who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance; and
6. any individual who (1) is not in an area open to the public and (2) can maintain at least 6 feet from all other individuals not residing in his or her household.

**28. Where do I get a copy of this Guidance?**

Answer: You can find the Guidance at the Elkhart County Health Department website at <http://www.elkhartcountyindiana.com/>.

**29. If I still have questions, who can I call?**

Answer: You can call the Elkhart County Health Department COVID-19 Hotline at (574) 523-2106.

Issued on June 12, 2020, in Elkhart County, Indiana, by Dr. Lydia Mertz, Elkhart County Local Health Officer in connection with the Elkhart County Health Department Guidance on Wearing Face Coverings.