



COVID-19 Face Coverings: Frequently Asked Questions

All New Yorkers must wear a face covering when outside of their home to help stop the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Wearing a face covering does not make you invincible! New Yorkers still need to stay home as much as possible, especially if sick. It is essential that people continue to practice physical distancing and good hand hygiene even when wearing a face covering — including keeping 6 feet of distance between themselves and others whenever possible. A face covering is one more precaution we can take to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a face covering?

A face covering is any well-secured paper or cloth (like a bandana or scarf) that covers your nose and mouth.

Who must wear a face covering?

All New Yorkers must wear a face covering when they need to be outside their home and may not be able to maintain at least 6 feet of distance between themselves and others. See Governor Cuomo's Executive Order No. 202.17, available at governor.ny.gov/executiveorders. If you live in a facility that has shared kitchens, bathrooms, or other common spaces, wear a face covering when you leave your apartment or room.

People who are sick should wear a face covering while at home if they cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others. People who are sick and who need to leave their home, such as to get essential medical care, should always wear a face covering.

Do children need to wear a face covering?

Children less than 2 years of age should **not** wear a face covering. Children 2 years of age or older should wear a face covering. Small children are more likely to touch their face covering, so parents and caretakers should wash children's hands or apply hand sanitizer often.

I have a health problem that makes it hard for me to wear a face covering. Do I still need to wear a face covering?

No. If you have breathing problems or another health issue that makes you unable to tolerate a face covering, you do not need to wear one. This makes practicing physical distancing and good hand hygiene even more essential.

If you have serious health problems affecting your heart or lungs, you are at a higher risk for severe illness if you get COVID-19. As such, you should stay home as much as possible and be

sure to practice good hand hygiene and maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others if you need to leave home.

When do essential workers need to wear a face covering?

Essential workers are required to wear a face covering at work if they have direct contact with customers or others. Employers must provide face coverings to employees at employers' expense. See Governor Cuomo's Executive Order No. 202.16, available at governor.ny.gov/executiveorders.

Do I always need to wear a face covering when outside my home?

If you are sick, yes. Remember you must stay home if you are sick and only leave for essential medical care or to get basic necessities such as groceries.

If you are not sick, you should wear a face covering whenever you need to leave home and might be closer than 6 feet from others. Examples include riding the subway, ferry, or bus; riding in a taxi or car service; walking on a busy street; going to pharmacies and grocery stores; and going to the doctor or a hospital.

Do I need to wear a face covering when I am exercising?

No — as long as you maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others.

People should only engage in exercise that enables them to keep physical distance from others. Walking, running, and biking are good examples of activities that do not require shared equipment or close contact with others.

I was confirmed to have COVID-19 or had symptoms of COVID-19 and am better now, do I still need to wear a face covering?

The New York State requirement to wear a face covering still applies even if you had COVID-19. There is a lot we still don't know about COVID-19, including how long the virus remains in someone's body and whether it's possible to get sick again. For this reason, it is important to continue physical distancing and other precautions even after you are better. This includes wearing a face covering when you are outside your home and cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance between yourself and others.

Remember if you had or may have had COVID-19, you should not leave home except for essential medical care or to get basic necessities until **all** the following are true:

- It has been at least seven days since your symptoms started.
- You never had a fever **or** you have not had a fever for the last three days without taking fever-reducing drugs such as Tylenol or ibuprofen.
- Your overall illness has improved.

Why are you recommending wearing a face covering?

There is a lot we are still learning about COVID-19. However, there is increased evidence that people without symptoms may be able to spread the virus, and that droplets produced when breathing, speaking, or singing may spread COVID-19 from person to person.

We continue to think staying home and practicing physical distancing and good hand hygiene are the most important ways to stop the spread of COVID-19. Requiring that New Yorkers use a face covering is one more thing that may help reduce the spread, especially from people who are sick and do not know it yet.

What type of face covering is better — paper or cloth?

Either a paper or cloth face covering is fine — as long as you are covering your nose and mouth.

However, **please do not hoard paper face masks, especially medical grade masks**, such as N95 masks or surgical masks. These masks are in very short supply and our health care providers need masks to stay healthy and to care for the most critically ill. Health care workers cannot keep distance from others, avoid sick people, or avoid contact with others' bodily fluid such as saliva, so it is essential that we reserve masks for them.

How often do I need to wash my face covering?

If you are using a cloth face covering, we recommend washing once a day by hand or machine using detergent. **The face covering should be fully dry before using.** People should have at least two face coverings so they can rotate for washing.

For how long can I use a paper face covering?

If you use a paper face covering, we recommend that you use a new one every day. Throw used face coverings into the garbage when you are done.

Please don't use health care worker masks, such as N95 or surgical masks. It is essential that we save health care worker masks for our health care workers! Use a bandana, a scarf, or a covering that you have made yourself rather than using masks that are needed by our health care workers on the front lines of this pandemic.

Are there precautions I should take with my face covering?

Using face coverings incorrectly can spread germs. For this reason, it is important to properly wear, store and dispose of face coverings by doing the following:

- When putting on and taking off a face covering, you might touch your face. As such, please wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water or, if not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer every time you put on and take off your face covering. If you are unable to clean your hands, be very careful not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth when putting on and taking off your face covering.
- Do not put a used face covering in places where others can touch them or where germs trapped in your face covering can touch other surfaces, such as counter tops or your kitchen table.

- Do not throw your face covering loose in a bag or backpack. Keep a plastic bag with you to store your face covering if you will be taking it off when outside your home.
- Used paper masks should be thrown out at the end of the day. Properly dispose in the garbage. Do not throw single-use face coverings or disposable gloves on the street.

Is it possible to make your own face covering?

Yes! A face covering can be a scarf, bandana or other cloth. See [facebook.com/nycmayorsoffice/videos/729510477585270](https://www.facebook.com/nycmayorsoffice/videos/729510477585270) for some ideas on how to make a face covering. Additional ideas can be found at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html).

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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