Face coverings: Frequently asked questions for people with disability and their support workers
Last updated: 30 July 2020

From 11.59pm on Sunday 2 August, all Victorians aged 12 years and older must wear a face covering whenever they leave their home, unless an exception applies.

A face mask is the recommended face covering. A face mask includes any paper or textile covering designed or made to be worn over the nose and mouth to protect the wearer. It does not have to be medical grade and you can make your own. There are instructions on how to make a mask on the Department's website - how to make your own mask (PDF). If a face mask is not available, other forms of face covering may be used, such as a scarf or bandana.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) website provides general guidance about the use of face coverings and provides information about masks how to use them. This information can be found at: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-covid-19

Wearing face coverings

Why do I need to wear a face covering?

Wearing a face covering helps keep you and others safe. Coronavirus (COVID-19) is spread from close contact with a person with the virus. Face coverings are helpful to stop droplets from spreading when someone speaks, laughs, coughs or sneezes, including someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19) and is contagious but feels well. Face masks are better at this than other coverings such as scarves and bandanas.

Face coverings are an additional protective physical barrier to protect you and your loved ones from coronavirus (COVID-19). The best way to help protect other people from coronavirus (COVID-19) is by getting tested and then staying at home if you are unwell, keeping at least 1.5 metres away from others, washing your hands often, and coughing or sneezing into a tissue or your elbow...

When should I wear a face covering?

Unless an exception applies, you must wear a face covering when you leave your home.

Even with a face covering, you should only leave home if you are well. You should not leave home if you are feeling unwell or have any symptoms such as a fever, sore throat, cough or runny nose, a loss of a sense of smell or taste. If you have these symptoms you should get tested and then stay home while you wait for your test results.

Is it ok if I don't want to wear a face covering?

No. You must wear a face covering when you leave your home unless you have a lawful reason not to.

There are a number of lawful reasons for not wearing a face covering including if you have a medical condition or other condition that impairs your ability to wear a face covering, doing strenuous exercise or if wearing a face covering would create a risk to your health and safety related to your work, as determined through OH&S guidelines. Exceptions for not wearing a

face covering are found on the [department's website](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-covid-19) <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-covid-19 >.

If you are unable to wear a face covering due to an exception, you should be extra careful about keeping at least 1.5 metres between you and other people and practice good hygiene, which includes washing your hands regularly, coughing and sneezing into a tissue or your elbow, disposing of tissues into a rubbish bin and keeping your living area clean.

Do I need a medical certificate to show that I have an exemption?

You do not need a medical certificate stating that you have a lawful reason for not wearing a face covering. If you have a lawful reason for not wearing a face covering, you do not need to apply for an exemption or permit.

If you are stopped by police, they will ask you to confirm the lawful reason you are not wearing a face covering.

What type of face covering should I wear?

The best face covering is either a reusable cloth mask or a single-use surgical mask. Single-use surgical masks can be disposed of quickly and easily in the rubbish bin. Cloth face coverings require washing after each use and need to be stored in a closed container (for example, a plastic bag) separately from your clothes.

Alternative face coverings are face shields (see-through plastic screens that cover the whole face) or scarves or bandanas. These will also need to be cleaned or washed after use.

More information on types of face coverings is available at https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-covid-19

Where can I get cloth face masks or single-use surgical masks?

You can purchase cloth face masks or single-use surgical masks from retail outlets including chemists, hardware stores and other shops. The Department of Health and Human Services has also prepared advice on how to [make your own cloth mask](#).

The Victorian Government is distributing reusable face masks to people living with disability and workforces who come into direct client contact and deliver Victorian Government-funded health and human services. For more information, visit the [department's coronavirus website](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus) < https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus >.

How do I use a face mask safely?

For people who choose to wear a face mask to cover their faces, it is important to wear it properly.

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser before putting on your mask **and** after taking it off.
- Check for defects in the mask such as tears or broken loops.
- Check the manufacturer's instructions about which side of the mask should face outwards
- Make sure the face mask covers your nose and mouth and fits snugly under your chin, over the bridge of your nose and against the sides of your face.

- Do not touch the front of your face mask while wearing or removing it. If you touch the front of your face mask while you're wearing it, you need to wash or sanitise your hands afterwards.
- Do not allow the face mask to hang around your neck or under your nose.
- Do not pull your face mask up and down to talk, drink or eat.
- A single-use face mask may be worn for up to four hours, and changed sooner if it becomes damp, dirty or damaged.
- Do not reuse single-use masks.
- Wash your reusable mask in the washing machine with other clothes or hand wash using soap and hot water. Once dry, store in a clean dry place.

It is really important to know how to put on a face mask properly and take it off safely. Otherwise the advantages of wearing a face mask will be lost and you or others may be at risk from a contaminated face covering. Follow this advice when removing your face mask:
https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-covid-19#whats-the-best-way-to-take-off-a-face-mask

Will wearing a face covering protect me from coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Wearing a face covering can help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) but it is still possible to catch and spread coronavirus (COVID-19) while wearing a face covering. That's why you'll still need to practice all the other precautions such as:

- if you're feeling sick, get tested and then stay at home until you receive your results
- maintain physical distance (at least 1.5 metres) from other people when out
- avoid large gatherings and crowded spaces
- wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser regularly, and make sure you cough and sneeze into a tissue or your elbow
- regularly clean your environment, particularly surfaces that are frequently touched such as bench tops, door handles and light switches.

Always tell carers and other people around you if you are feeling unwell. If you have symptoms, it is important to get tested.

If I'm wearing a face covering, do I still need to physically distance from people?

Yes, physical distancing is important to slowing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) even if you are wearing a face covering. A face covering provides extra protection but is not a guarantee against the spread of infection. Regularly washing your hands or using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser also remains vital, particularly when putting on and taking off a face covering.

Support workers/carers

Does my support worker/carer need to wear a face covering when they are with me?

Yes, your support worker must wear a face covering to help keep you and themselves safe from coronavirus (COVID-19). Support workers must wear a single use surgical mask. In very limited circumstances, there may be other options such as using a face shield. They should not use a reusable cloth mask, scarf or bandana.

What do I do if I feel uncomfortable or frightened about my support worker wearing a face mask?

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Face masks can be confronting – but they are very important in keeping both of you safe. If seeing your support worker in a face mask reduces your sense of confidence or safety, you should talk to them about this and how you might find ways to overcome this together.

If you find it hard to understand or hear when your support worker wears a face mask, you might need to work together to find out how you can receive support and still be protected from possible spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

In very limited circumstances, there may be other options such as using a face shield.

Is it ok if my support worker does not wear a face mask?

No. Support workers need to be wearing a face mask all the time, unless there is a valid exception. If you are feeling very scared or uncomfortable you and your support worker should talk about this and how you might find ways to overcome this together.
If you are deaf or hard of hearing and the ability to see the other person's mouth is essential for communication, a face covering is not required but you must practice physical distancing.

Does my support worker need to wear a face mask at other times when they are in my house?

Yes. Support workers need to wear a face mask when they are with you and other people. The support worker should wear their face mask all the time when they are in your house.

How often should my support worker change their face mask?

A surgical mask may be worn for up to four hours, however it must be changed sooner if it becomes damp, dirty or damaged. The mask should be used continuously and discarded if it is removed between clients (single-use surgical masks should not be reused).

At home

Do I need to wear a face covering when I'm alone at home or in my room?

No. You do not need to wear a face covering when you are at home or in your room alone.

Do I need to wear a face covering when I am home with the people I normally live with?

If you are home with the people you usually live with, and everyone is feeling well, you don't have to wear a face covering. However, if you are feeling unwell and have symptoms, you should seek medical advice or get tested for coronavirus (COVID-19). If you are feeling unwell, you should wear a face covering when you are in a shared space.

Visitors

Do visitors need to wear a face covering?

Visitors in your home are only permitted in certain areas in Victoria. Please visit the DHHS website to see if you are allowed to visit friends and family.

It is important that visitors wear a face covering to reduce the risk of introducing coronavirus (COVID-19) into the house. Visitors cannot enter the house if they are feeling unwell or have been confirmed as having coronavirus (COVID-19).

If you live in a disability residential service, visitors are being restricted to help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). Carers who come to see you will need to wear a face mask to

reduce the risk of introducing coronavirus (COVID-19) into the disability residential service.

Children

Do children need to wear face coverings?

Children over the age of 12 must wear a face covering when they leave their home, including when they are at school and when travelling to and from school.

Children under the age of 12 do not need to wear face coverings when they leave their home. **Due to risk of choking, it is not safe to use a face mask on any child two years or younger.**

There are exceptions for children with disability, if it is impractical or unsafe to wear a face covering. For example, if wearing a face covering poses a medical risk or will significantly limit communication or cause undue anxiety.

Students over 12 years old who attend a specialist school are not required to wear a face covering where their disability means it would not be suitable but may do so if they or their family choose to. For more information on face coverings and requirements for children: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-covid-19

Do children's teachers need to wear face coverings at school?

It is not compulsory for teachers, educators and carers to wear face coverings while teaching or caring for children as face coverings can interfere with their ability to clearly communicate with students or children in their care. Teachers, educators and carers can choose to wear face coverings if they wish when teaching or providing care for children. Teachers, educators and carers should wear face coverings in other areas of the school/ facility when not teaching.

When do children's parents/carers need to wear face coverings?

From 11:59pm on Sunday 2 August, you must wear a face covering when leaving home unless you have a lawful reason for not doing so. You do not need to wear a face covering if you are at home with members of your household.

Carers working in disability services must wear a surgical mask. If a child has been tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), it is important for parents/carers to wear a face mask when they are near or within 1.5 metres of the child to help prevent any spread of the virus. If it is possible without causing alarm or discomfort, a child who has been tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) should also wear a face mask when carers/parents are close to them.

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Available at the Department of Health and Human Services Coronavirus webpage <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>