



WA Department of Health Issues Mandate for Face Coverings in Public

June 24, 2020

Due to an increase in the number of people testing positive for COVID-19 in Washington State in the last week, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is requiring that face masks be worn in public settings. This includes all indoor settings such as grocery stores, pharmacies, health clinics, or hardware stores. The requirement also applies to outdoor public settings where it is not possible to maintain a six-foot separation from other people (who are not members of the same household) at all times. Children under five years old are exempted from the requirement, but the DOH recommends face masks for children 3 – 5 years old.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [recommends](#) that people use cloth face coverings to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 through speaking, coughing, or sneezing. COVID-19 can be spread by those who are not experiencing symptoms (“asymptomatic”) to others when in close proximity, or in locations where physical distancing cannot be practically maintained at all times. The CDC recommends maintaining physical distancing when possible, even when wearing a mask.

To satisfy the requirement, masks can be any type of manufactured or homemade cloth covering that completely covers the nose and mouth. Acceptable masks can be:

- A mask with sewn-on ties or elastic straps that secure around the head or behind the ears
- Multiple layers of fabric tied around the head
- Made of cotton, fleece, linen, or other fabrics
- Made in a factory or at home

The CDC has [instructions](#) for sewing your own mask, or making a simple mask using a bandana and rubber bands.

The CDC and WA DOH are both requesting that people do not use N95 respirators or surgical masks, as they are still needed for medical workers. Fabric or cloth face coverings may not provide the same protection against contracting COVID-19 as N95 respirators, but they do prevent the wearer from releasing virus particles into the air when speaking, coughing, or sneezing.

Some people should not wear cloth face coverings and are exempt from the mandate:

- Children under the age of two years
- People with disabilities that make it difficult to wear or remove a face covering
- People with respiratory conditions that make breathing while wearing a mask difficult

- Anyone instructed by a medical, legal, or behavioral health professional to not wear face coverings

Face coverings do not need to be worn:

- In the home (unless there are people who are not members of the household present)
- When alone in your car
- When outside with ample physical distancing from other people

Caring for your cloth face covering:

- Wash your face covering daily using detergent and hot water
- Dry completely using high heat setting, or dry in direct sunlight if possible
- DOH recommends that each person has five masks to ensure a clean mask is always available when needed

Throw out any cloth face covering that:

- Does not effectively cover the nose and mouth
- Is stretched out and does not maintain a snug fit on the face
- Has holes or tears

Governor Inslee has stated that this mandate is enforceable, and there may be penalties enforced on violators. The mandate takes effect on June 26, 2020.

Resources:

Washington State Department of Health Coronavirus news:

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>

Center for Disease Control “What You Should Know” Coronavirus information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>

[Center for Disease Control Guidance for Businesses:](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission:

https://www.eeoc.gov/facts/pandemic_flu.html