

# Mandatory masks in indoor public places

## *Businesses and workplaces*

The evidence on non-medical masks has evolved through the pandemic, and our public health direction has evolved along with it. We have learned that non-medical masks are effective, in combination with other core personal public health measures, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Effective July 31, 2020, masks are mandatory in most indoor public places.

### **Indoor public places include:**

- retail businesses and shopping centres
- personal services businesses such as a hair and nail salons, spas, body art facilities, except during services that require removing a mask
- restaurants and bars, except while you are eating or drinking
- places of worship or faith gatherings
- places for cultural or entertainment services or activities such as movie theatres, concerts, and other performances
- places for sports and recreational activities such as a gym, pool, or indoor tennis facility, except during an activity where a mask cannot be worn
- rental halls or rooms for special events such as conferences and receptions, faith gatherings, weddings and funerals, and arts and culture events
- municipal or provincial government locations offering services to the public
- common areas of tourist accommodations such as lobbies, elevators and hallways
- common areas of office buildings such as lobbies, elevators and hallways, but not private offices

- public areas of a university or college campus such as library, student union building or common areas of a faculty building, but not classrooms, labs, offices or residences
- train or bus stations, ferry terminals, and airports

## **What does mandatory mask use in indoor public places mean for businesses and workplaces?**

In an office building, masks are required in the common areas such as the lobby, elevators and hallways. Once you enter a private business's space, masks are not mandatory under the public health order but the business can choose to set its own policies for mask use.

In a retail business, areas that the public has ready access to are considered public and masks must be worn. Areas that the public cannot access are private and the business may set its own policies for mask use in these areas.

Like all hazards in a workplace, businesses and workplaces should develop a plan to prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19.

## **If a you rent a space for a private business meeting, are masks required?**

Masks are not required if you rent a space for a private meeting but you are limited to 50 people. Masks are required if you are renting a space to host special events like a conference or reception, arts and culture events, and faith gatherings, weddings or funerals.

## **Should businesses and workplaces put up signs saying masks are mandatory?**

Businesses, organizations and workplaces where masks are required under the public health order (or under their own policies) are encouraged to post a sign to let customers and clients know that masks are mandatory. There is a downloadable Face Mask Required sign here:

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/resources/>

## **Do I need to provide masks to employees and customers?**

Businesses are responsible for providing safety equipment to their employees. It is up to a business to decide whether they would do the same for customers. Small businesses can contact the Department of Business at [NSEconomy@novascotia.ca](mailto:NSEconomy@novascotia.ca) to request a limited supply of masks for this purpose.

## **What if a customer does not want to wear a mask?**

Businesses should follow the public health directive regarding mandatory masks in indoor public places. It is important to note businesses have the right to set policies for their operations. People should be aware that businesses have the right to refuse them entry or refuse to serve them if they don't follow the rules. However, businesses also need to accommodate people with valid medical reasons for not wearing a mask.

## **How will mandatory mask use be enforced?**

At this time, we are taking a cooperative and positive approach to mandatory masking rather than an enforcement approach. While our focus with mandatory masking is around education and awareness, like the other public health measures in place, failure by individuals to comply with the requirements outlined within the Health Protection Act Order may be considered a breach and may result in penalties. However, we have confidence that the vast majority of Nova Scotians will understand the need to protect each other, especially those who may be more vulnerable, and wear one.

## **What are the exemptions to wearing a mask?**

- children under the age of 2
- children 2 to 4 when their caregiver can't get them to wear a mask
- anyone with a valid medical reason for not wearing a mask
- anyone who is reasonably accommodated under the Human Rights Act
- anyone who is unable to remove the mask without assistance

- people in a courtroom or jury room
- performer or officiant who is performing activities that require vocalization (like talking or singing) at a faith gathering, wedding, funeral, social event, or arts and culture event
- people in a room for events (like a hotel, convention or conference meeting room) attending a private business meeting with no more than 50 people

## **What are medical reasons for not wearing a mask?**

There is relatively small number of valid medical reasons to not wear a mask. The Canadian Thoracic Society states that there is no evidence that wearing a mask worsens a chronic lung condition such as asthma or COPD.

For some people with chronic breathing conditions or mental health conditions, wearing a mask can create anxiety. In many cases, there are ways to overcome anxiety such as practicing wearing a mask for short periods of time at home. We recognize this won't work for everyone.

There are also some people with cognitive or developmental disabilities who are unable to wear a mask.

## **If an employee or customer has a medical reason for not wearing a mask, do I need to see a medical certificate?**

Please do not ask employees or customers to provide proof of a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a mask. Also, please be aware of a fake document that is circulating that suggests it is proof from public health officials that the bearer cannot wear a mask. No public health agency has authorized this document.

## **Can a business ask a customer to remove your mask for identification purposes?**

Yes, businesses are allowed to ask and people are allowed to comply by momentarily removing their mask.

## **Are face shields okay to use instead of masks?**

No, for the purposes of this new rule, a face shield cannot be worn instead of a non-medical mask. This is because a face shield protects the wearer's eyes but it does not protect other people if the wearer coughs or sneezes. A face shield and mask can be worn together, but most Nova Scotians are not going to be in situations that warrant wearing both.

## **If we have plexiglass barriers, will my employees still require a mask?**

Yes. While the plexiglass provides an immediate barrier if someone coughs toward it, the virus can still move in the air around it. This is the case in buildings and vehicles where plexiglass is installed (unless it is 100% sealed, which is not typical). So masks are still necessary to protect everyone, but the plexiglass is still a good investment because it provides an extra layer of protection, especially in places like a checkout where physical distancing is difficult.

## **How do you properly wear a non-medical mask?**

People should learn how to put on and take off a mask safely. Please use the poster and/or handout at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/resources/> to help your staff and customers learn.

## **What do you do with your mask while you're not wearing it?**

After wearing your mask, inspect it for tears or holes. If it's damaged, put it in the garbage – please do not litter. When your reusable mask becomes damp or dirty, wash it with hot, soapy water and let it dry completely before wearing it again. You can include a cloth mask with other laundry. Store your mask in a clean place until you need to wear it again.

## **If you're wearing a mask, does that mean you don't have to worry about other public health measures?**

No, masks need to be used as part of the package of personal protective measures: stay home if you feel unwell, wash or sanitize your hands often, use proper cough and sneeze etiquette, physically distance as much as possible, avoid touching your face, mouth, nose and eyes, limit the number of people you get together with, and clean high-touch surfaces and objects frequently.

## **Where can I find more information about masks?**

Please visit our webpage on non-medical masks: <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/masks/>

## **If I have questions, where do I call for advice about how to comply?**

Please contact the Safety Branch at the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education:

Phone: 1-800-952-2687

Email: [laesafetybranch@novascotia.ca](mailto:laesafetybranch@novascotia.ca)