



## Face Coverings: Frequently Asked Questions

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene recommends that all New Yorkers 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 social (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 that may 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 mouth and nose.

#### **Who should wear a face covering?**

All New Yorkers should wear a face covering when they need to be outside their home and may be closer than 6 feet from others.

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 home, such as to get urgent medical care, should always wear a face covering.

#### **Do I need to wear a face covering all the time when outside my house?**

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 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.

Essential workers should also wear a face covering at work when they cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance between themselves and others.

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

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

People should only do 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 and am better now, do I still need to wear a face covering?**

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, we recommend that you 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 the house except for essential medical care or to get essential needs until all the following are true:

- It has been at least 7 days since your symptoms started.
- You never had a fever or you have not had a fever for the last 3 days without taking fever-reducing drugs such as Tylenol or ibuprofen.
- Your overall illness has improved.

### **Why are you recommending this now?**

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. By recommending that New Yorkers use a face covering, we are adding 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 paper or cloth face covering is fine — as long as you are covering your nose and mouth.

However, **please do not hoard paper 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 a couple of face coverings so they can rotate for washing.

**For how long can I use a paper face covering?**

If you use a non-health care worker paper face covering, we recommend that you use a new one every day. 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?**

- In taking on and off a face covering, you will likely 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 take on and 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.
- Used paper masks should be thrown out at the end of the day.
- Do not throw your face covering loose in a bag or backpack. We recommend keeping a plastic bag with you to store your face covering if you will be taking it off when outside the house.

**Is it possible to make your own face covering?**

Yes! A face covering can be a scarf, bandana or other cloth.