



Face Coverings

The Boston Public Health Commission is encouraging people to wear a face covering when they leave their home to help stop the spread of COVID-19. People still need to continue to practice social distancing and good hand hygiene, even when wearing a face covering. Wearing a face covering may help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. Boston residents are also urged to stay home as much as possible, especially if sick.

What is a face covering?

A face covering is any well-secured paper or cloth (like a bandana or scarf) that covers the mouth and nose. The face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are crucial supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders.

Who should wear a face covering?

Anyone who needs to be outside of their home is encouraged to wear a face covering and practice social distancing.

People who are sick should not leave their home and should also wear a face covering while inside if they cannot stay 6 feet apart from others. People who are sick and need to leave home, such as to get urgent medical care, should always wear a face covering.

Per the CDC, face coverings should not be placed on young children under 2-years-old, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

How do I wear a face covering?

Face coverings should:

- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- Be secured with ties or ear loops
- Include multiple layers of fabric, if it is a cloth covering
- Allow for breathing without restriction

Do face coverings need to be worn all the time when outside of the house?

Anyone who needs to be outside of their home is encouraged to wear a face covering and practice social distancing.

If a person is sick, yes, a face covering should be worn at all times when outside. People who have COVID-19 must stay home and only leave for essential medical care or to get basic necessities such as groceries.

Should a face covering be worn while exercising?

BPHC is encouraging everyone to wear a face covering when outside. When exercising, if people need to remove a face covering to breathe adequately, make sure no one is around before removing it. Keep the face covering readily available so it can be placed back on should a person come within 6 feet of others. It is also important for people to stay at least 6 feet away from one another. 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.

Should people who had COVID-19 and are now better 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, it is recommended that people continue physical distancing and other precautions even after they recover from COVID-19. This includes wearing a face covering when they are outside their home.

Why is this recommendation been made 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. The use of a face covering will help stop the spread of COVID-19. Staying home and practicing physical distancing and good hand hygiene are still the most important ways to stop the spread of COVID-19.

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

Either paper or cloth face covering is fine as long as it covers the nose and mouth. The face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are crucial supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders to care for the most critically ill. Health care workers and first responders cannot keep distance from others, avoid sick people, or avoid contact with others' bodily fluid, such as respiratory secretion and saliva, so it is essential that we reserve masks for them.

How often should cloth face coverings be washed?

It is recommended to wash 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.

How long can paper face coverings be used?

Non-health care worker paper face coverings should be used once. A new one should be used every day. Health care worker masks, such as N95 or surgical masks, should not be used in order to preserve protective equipment for health care workers and those serving on the front lines in response to COVID-19.

Are there any precautions that need to be taken when removing face coverings?

- Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water every time you take on and off the face covering. If soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Individuals should be careful not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth when removing 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 a kitchen table.
- Used paper masks should be thrown out at the end of the day in the regular trash so others will not come in contact with them.
- Do not throw your face covering loose in a bag or backpack. Keep a paper or 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. For directions on how to make a cloth face covering at home, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>.

