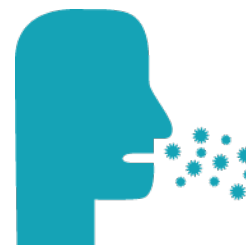


## Wearing a mask safely

Across Canada many cities are mandating mask wearing in indoor public spaces and on transit, including in both Edmonton (1) and Calgary (2). The reason we wear face masks is to limit the main source of virus transmission – the respiratory droplets from mouth and nose – to more safely allow individuals to enter community (rather than staying locked in their houses)(3,4,5,6).

Despite the benefits of masks, they also come with some risks, such as infecting oneself with contaminated hands when bringing hands to the face to put on, to remove, or to adjust a mask (5,6,7); infecting oneself with bacterial pneumonia because of repeated wearing of unwashed masks (7). To be fair, masks also create some challenges, but these won't be addressed in this document.

Use this “how-to” document to effectively and confidently protect yourself and others in the community.



Masks limit the spread of respiratory droplets that might contain virus.

### What to bring when you go out

- 2-3 clean masks, ideally in a sealable plastic bag
- a breathable bag to store soiled bags
- portable hand sanitizer



Cover mouth and nose to contain the respiratory droplets

### Putting on a mask (5,6):

1. Wash or sanitize your hands.
2. Put on your mask to **cover BOTH mouth AND nose**. Touch mainly the straps and the side edges of the mask, but avoid touching the front if you can. If it's a clean mask, you're done.  
If you're putting on a mask that you wore recently:
3. Wash or sanitize your hands again.

### Taking off a mask (5,6):

1. Wash or sanitize your hands.
2. Remove your mask by handling the straps and side edges.
3. Dispose of the mask in a garbage can OR store the mask in a breathable bag for later use or for washing.
4. Wash or sanitize your hands.

### Adjusting your mask (7):

- If you can, use the edges and/or straps to adjust the mask's positioning. If you have to touch the front of the mask, sanitize your hands after doing so.
- If you have an itch on your face that you can't ignore: 1) sanitize your hands; 2) scratch or rub the itch; 3) make sure your mask is still appropriately positioned; 4) sanitize your hands again.
- If you accidentally touch your mask while wearing it, immediately sanitize your hands.



Expect to wash or sanitize your hands often: every time your hands approach your face.



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### Reusing masks:

- For the general public, it's usually okay to reuse both cloth and disposable masks, but it is important to change them regularly, e.g. halfway through the day if you have to wear a mask all day (8).
- If a mask becomes wet (such as after you sneeze), is visibly dirty or damaged, replace it immediately (7).
- Wash cloth masks in your usual laundry (5,6,7). Colin Furness, an infection control epidemiologist and assistant professor at the University of Toronto, recommends washing them in boiling water occasionally to kill any bacteria and their spores to prevent bacterial pneumonia (7).
- With disposable masks, store them in a breathable bag for about 3 days before reusing them, so any coronavirus has time to deactivate. Steam disposable masks to kill any bacteria in the mask (8).

### Storing clean masks:

- Ideally, store clean masks in a plastic sealable bag to keep them clean (5,8).  
If that's not practical/possible, for the average member of the community, there is little risk to storing a clean mask in your pocket or purse (8).

### Storing used masks:

- Store a used mask in a breathable bag, e.g. paper, sealable vegetable bag (perforated) to allow moisture to evaporated – moisture is an ideal breeding ground for bacteria that could cause pneumonia (8).

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