

COVID-19 health and safety

Selecting and using masks

B.C.'s provincial health officer has not recommended the widespread use of face masks. Employers considering the use of masks at their workplaces should ensure that other measures are in place, including physical distancing, handwashing, and staying at home when sick. Employers must understand the limitations of masks as a protective measure, and must also ensure that masks are selected and used appropriately.

How COVID-19 spreads

COVID-19 is an infectious disease that mainly spreads among humans through direct contact with an infected person and their respiratory droplets. Respiratory droplets are generated by breathing, speaking, coughing, and sneezing. Your exposure risk is greatest when you have prolonged close contact with an infected person.

The virus can also spread if you touch a contaminated surface and then touch your eyes, mouth, or nose. A surface can become contaminated if droplets land on it or if someone touches it with contaminated hands.

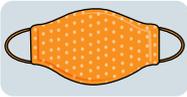
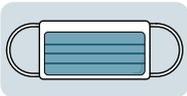
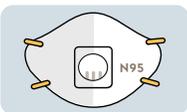
Should your workers use masks in the workplace?

The most effective ways to prevent the spread of infection include handwashing, cleaning and disinfecting work areas, physical distancing, and having sick workers stay at home. Employers may consider the use of masks as an additional control measure in combination with these measures. Some industry associations may recommend the use of masks as a worker protection or public health measure.

If your workers are wearing masks, ensure they are aware of the following:

- Cloth and surgical masks may not protect you from the virus because they do not form a tight seal with the face. However, they can reduce the spread of your respiratory droplets to others.
- Keep your mask clean and dry. If it gets wet, it's less effective at preventing the spread of droplets.
- Change masks as necessary. You may need several masks available as they build up moisture during the day and become less effective. If your mask becomes wet, soiled, or damaged, replace it immediately.
- Make sure you know how to wear and clean your mask. Wash cloth masks every day using the warmest water setting. Store in a clean, dry place to prevent contamination.
- Practise good hygiene even if you're wearing a mask. This includes covering sneezes and coughs and washing hands. Don't touch your eyes, nose, mouth, or mask (if you're wearing one).

The difference between cloth masks, surgical masks, and respirators

Type	Use
Cloth masks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May offer some level of protection to others by preventing the wide spread of droplets from the wearer. However, they are not a proven method of protection for the wearer as they may not prevent the inhalation of droplets.• May be considered by employers for use by workers and/or customers as a protective measure in combination with other controls, including physical distancing and appropriate hygiene practices. Masks should never be relied upon as a sole protective measure.• Cloth masks, including homemade masks, may be worn by workers as a matter of personal choice.• Cloth masks must be washed before they are reused. Replace masks that are wet, soiled, or damaged.
Surgical masks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Surgical masks, also referred to as medical masks, are specifically designed for health care environments.• Like cloth masks, these offer limited protection to the wearer from the inhalation of droplets, but may offer some protection to others by preventing the wide spread of droplets from the wearer.• Should be preserved for use by health care workers, whenever possible.• Employers outside of health care may consider these as part of their workplace controls to protect against the spread of COVID-19 in combination with other controls, recognizing there may be a lack of availability of surgical masks.• May be worn as a matter of personal choice by workers.• These are single-use items that should not be cleaned and reused.
Disposable respirators, such as N95 or P100 types 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primarily used in health care settings to prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. Other sectors may use these to protect against a variety of hazards, including silica dust.• These must be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and the use of these masks is regulated under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation.• Due to lack of availability, employers outside of health care should not consider these as part of their workplace controls to protect against the spread of COVID-19.• Some dust masks may be similar in appearance to N95 disposable respirators; however, they are not manufactured to the same standards and would be similar to cloth masks in terms of protection.

Let's all do our part

When workplaces in British Columbia are healthy and safe, they contribute to a safe and healthy province. As COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and more businesses resume operations, let's all do our part. For more information and resources on workplace health and safety, visit worksafebc.com.