

USE OF MASKS FAQs – Internal

June 16, 2020

What is the District of Saanich’s approach to the use of masks?

Advice regarding face masks continues to evolve and Saanich continues to monitor information shared by our Federal Health Officer Dr. Tam, our Provincial Health Officer Dr. Henry, and WorkSafeBC.

Use of non-medical masks in the workplace is an “all or none” action to be effective as a means of risk control from respiratory droplets containing the virus that cause COVID-19.

Considering this, the EOC decided that other than a few exceptions, non-medical masks will not be provided to Saanich staff. Please refer to the *COVID-19 Mask decision tree* for more detail.

The EOC continues to monitor what other employers are doing and what Island Health recommends and will adjust as needed.

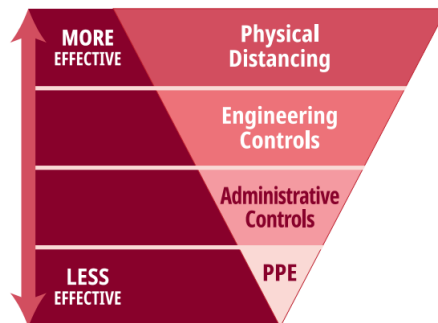
Should all Saanich staff wear masks while at work?

Saanich continues to monitor information shared by our Federal Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Tam, our Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Henry, and WorkSafeBC. WorkSafeBC notes that the most effective ways to prevent the spread of infection include handwashing, cleaning and disinfecting work areas, physical distancing and staying home if sick. **As personal protective equipment (PPE) is a less effective means of protecting staff from COVID-19, Saanich is focused on other more effective controls.**

Hierarchy of Controls For COVID-19

The hierarchy of controls is a framework for reducing transmission hazards. The most effective controls are at the top of the pyramid.

Source: Koehler, K, Rule A. Can a mask protect me? Putting homemade masks in the hierarchy of controls. [Internet] 2020 April 2. Johns Hopkins Education and Research Center for Occupational Safety and Health.



What if physical distancing cannot be maintained where I’m working?

There are certain exceptions where the use of non-medical masks may be supported, including for Saanich staff or crews if:

- a job or construction site is under the control of a Prime Contractor where the Prime Contractor has established the use of non-medical masks as a risk control for all workers on the construction site;
- the work to be performed requires two people to be within the 2 metre (6 feet) distance and no other means of respiratory protection is being used for the task or could be used for the tasks (e.g., ½ face or full face respirator). Examples included (but are not limited to):
 - excavations in which close work is performed;
 - road work requiring close proximity; or
 - tasks requiring a two-person lift or materials handling.
 If the task is to be performed on a consistent or repetitive basis – the use of a ½ face respirator is preferred
- otherwise reviewed by the EOC and approved (i.e. from a Form 550)

What’s the difference between a cloth (non-medical) mask, surgical mask and a respirator? How do I select the right kind of mask?

Information regarding masks and COVID-19 can be confusing. To assist, WorkSafeBC has published [Selecting and using masks](#). After referring to the *COVID-19 Mask Decision tree*, speak to your supervisor or manager about what type of mask you may need for your job if physical distancing cannot be maintained.

How do I properly use a cloth or non-medical mask?

WorkSafeBC has created a poster to help: [How to use a mask](#). Remember, you need to wash your hands before you put your mask on (also called donning) and when you remove it (doffing). If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.

How can I safely reuse a mask?

There are some instances where you may need or want to reuse a mask (this is especially the case for cloth masks). In those instances, the following steps are recommended:

Taking off your mask:

1. Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
2. Lean forward to remove your mask. Touch only the ear loops, not the front of the mask.
3. Visually inspect the mask. If it is torn, soiled or saturated, dispose of the mask safely in a bag or garbage can with a bag.
4. If the mask is to be reused, touching only the corners of the mask, carefully fold it so that the outer surface is folded inward and against itself. Store the folded mask in a paper or plastic bag. Do not hang your mask from your neck or ear, and do not hang them on other surfaces (e.g., rear view mirror).
5. Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.

Putting the mask back on:

1. Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
2. Grasp the ear loops and slide out of the bag. Remember the bent metal strip is the top of the mask and the blue surface is the outside.
3. Holding the top of the ear loop, place the bent metal strap over your nose and wrap the loops around your ears.
4. Slide your hands along the ear loops to the bottom and pull down on the strap so that the mask is secured under your chin.
5. Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer

What features should a mask have and what should be avoided?

Look for a non-medical face masks or face coverings that:

- allows for easy breathing;
- fits securely to the head with ties or ear loops;
- maintains its shape after washing and drying;
- can be changed as soon as possible if damp or dirty;
- is comfortable and does not require frequent adjustment;
- has at least two layers of tightly woven material fabric (such as cotton or linen); and
- is large enough to completely and comfortably cover the nose and mouth without gaping.

Some masks also include a pocket to accommodate a paper towel or disposable coffee filter for increased benefit.

Masks or face coverings **should not**:

- be shared with others;
- impair vision or interfere with tasks;
- be placed on children under the age of two years;
- be made of plastic or other non-breathable materials;
- be secured with tape or other inappropriate materials;
- be made exclusively of materials that easily fall apart, such as tissues;
- be placed on anyone unable to remove them without assistance or anyone who has trouble breathing; and
- have an exhalation valve if it is being worn to protect others who are not wearing a mask.

How effective is a non-medical mask?

Keep in mind that homemade and non-medical masks are not medical devices and are not regulated like surgical masks and respirators:

- They have not been tested to recognized standards;
- The fabrics are not the same as used in surgical masks or respirators; and
- The edges are not designed to form a seal around the nose and mouth.

Will wearing a mask protect me from contracting COVID-19?

Masks should be used by sick people to prevent transmission to other people. A mask will help keep a person's droplets from spreading. A mask protects others more effectively than the wearer of the mask. Using a mask is not enough and should be combined with other preventative measures such as frequent hand washing and physical distancing. Masks may give a person a false sense of security and are likely to increase the number of times a person will touch their own face (e.g., to adjust the mask).

Should I wear a mask if I'm healthy?

It may be less effective to wear a mask in the community when a person is not sick themselves. Masks may give a person a false sense of security and are likely to increase the number of times a person will touch their own face (e.g., to adjust the mask). Any mask, no matter how efficient at filtration or how good the seal, will have minimal effect if it is not used together with other preventive measures, such as frequent hand washing and physical distancing.

What else can I do to stay healthy and prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Frequent hand washing remains the most effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19. To prevent the spread, please ensure you:

- wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, especially with unwashed hands;
- avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- cough and sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve, not your hands;
- stay home if you are sick, especially if you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, to avoid spreading the illness to others; and
- practice physical distancing by keeping a two metre distance with others.

Masks should be used a last means of protecting yourself when hand washing and physical distancing are not available. All of the above is more effective and more important than mask-wearing.

Am I able to wear a mask to work?

If a staff member decided to wear a mask to work, their choice will be respected however, they should be aware that the mask provides protection to others and that others are not required to wear a mask. Masks will not be issued by Saanich other than the possible exceptions outlined above.

Should I wear a mask when using Saanich fleet vehicles?

If you are travelling alone, it's not necessary to wear a mask.

If you are traveling in a 4- or 5- seat vehicle, as per WorkSafeBC, two staff can travel together (without masks) if one sits in the driver's seat and one sits in the rear passenger side. This assumes that no other risk factors are present (i.e. neither worker is sick or experiencing cold or

flu-like symptoms, neither have been exposed to anyone who is symptomatic, etc). For more information see [May 2020 Special Crew Talk – COVID-19 and Physical Distancing: Two employees in a 4- or 5- seat vehicle.](#)

On June 17, 2020, Saanich will begin a pilot related to our fleet vehicles with fewer than four (4) seats. This pilot will include the use of non-medical masks. If you operate a vehicle that has been selected for the pilot, your supervisor or manager will let you know and you will be provided with the necessary instruction, training and non-medical masks. For more information see [June 2020 Special Crew Talk - COVID-19 and Physical Distancing - Pilot – Fleet trucks / vans](#)

What if members of the public are not adhering to physical distancing?

Staff should contact their manager or director to determine the best way to address this issue. This may include leaving the job site or work area to eliminate the risk.