

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Masks for Source Control in Non-Healthcare Workers

Masks (surgical/procedure masks or others such as cloth masks), can be worn to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to others (known as source control).
When used by all, masks protect everyone.

When using masks for source control, keep in mind:

- Masks worn for source control protect others from potential infectious particles of the wearer.
- Wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after touching the mask.
- If personal protective equipment (PPE) is required to perform a work task, that requirement takes priority over masking for source control. However, there are models that can do both, e.g., surgical/procedure masks, respirators without an exhalation valve.
- Ensure masks can be comfortably and properly worn for long periods and do not introduce a new work hazard e.g., entanglement in machinery, impairing vision, causing overheating, worsen an existing medical condition.

Assessing worker risk of exposure to COVID-19

- When community spread of virus is high, a common factor that increases exposure risk is the potential for contact with the public and coworkers who may be infected.
 - Risk of exposure can be decreased by controls available, e.g., ability to physically distance, physical barriers, working outdoors (more on next page).
 - The [US Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) provides further considerations for grouping COVID-19 exposure risks for workers.
- When masking as PPE is not required, masking for source control by all reduces risk of transmission, or particularly when workers are unable to physically distance.

Applying the hierarchy of controls

- While some of these measures may not be required, a comprehensive strategy to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace would include as many as possible to reduce exposure to the hazard (infectious source):
 - **Elimination:** Eliminate the hazard (e.g., vaccination to reduce community transmission, working from home)
 - **Engineering:** Remove/block the hazard (e.g., physical distancing through workspace design, physical barriers such as plexiglass booths, ventilation/filtration).
 - **Administrative:** Policies and procedures to minimize potential contact with the hazard (e.g., staggered shifts, breaks, and meals; work station spacing; work from home policies, limited hours, virtual meetings, paid sick leave, screening/reporting).
 - **Personal Hygiene:** Worker actions or behaviours to reduce hazard exposure (e.g., clean hands, coughing or sneezing into the sleeve, masking for source control).
 - **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Equipment worn to protect workers from hazards e.g., surgical/procedure masks, gloves, eye protection, gowns or coveralls.
- Masking for source control could be considered a personal hygiene measure. If implementing masking for source control, please note the following:
 - Masking is one measure in a broad strategy to reduce the risk of COVID-19, as described in Public Health Ontario's [How to Protect Yourself from COVID-19](#) factsheet.
 - Ensure the mask covers both the nose and mouth snugly and change masks if visibly soiled, damp, damaged or difficult to breathe through.
 - [Using Masks in the Workplace](#) is a Government of Ontario resource on selecting, using and caring for masks for both source control and PPE.
 - The American Society for Testing and Materials standard [F3502-21](#) provides specifications for masks used for source control. The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) also has guidance on how to use and care for cloth masks.
 - Refer to the Government of Ontario's [Face Coverings and Face Masks](#) and the [Ministry of Health](#) for more information.

Learn about the virus

To learn more and access up-to-date information on COVID-19, visit the Ontario Ministry of Health's website at ontario.ca/coronavirus.

The information in this document is current as of April 7, 2022.