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). Assess worker’s risk of COVID-19 exposure, and particularly their inability to physically distance, when considering source control masking. 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 droplets 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.
- 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

- 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.
- Where workers are required to work in close proximity (i.e., within 2 metres) with unmasked people, PPE may be required.
- 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

- A comprehensive strategy to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace would include as many controls as possible against 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 at the source (e.g., physical distancing through workspace design, physical barriers such as plexiglass booths, ventilation/filtration).
  - **Administrative:** Optimizing the movement of workers 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 behaviors to reduce hazard exposure (e.g., clean hands, coughing or sneezing into the sleeve, masking for source control).
  - **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** 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](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/HealthTopics/HealthTopicsA-Z/COVID19/How-to-Protection-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](https://www.gov.on.ca_consumers/consumer-safety/campaign/using-masks-workplace) is a Government of Ontario resource on selecting, using and caring for masks for both source control and PPE.

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**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](https://www.ontario.ca/coronavirus).

The information in this document is current as of February 15, 2022.

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