

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

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 clean with alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently and immediately after touching the mask.
- Some workers may have conditions (e.g. asthma, eczema) that make masking difficult or uncomfortable, that may need to be considered or accommodated.
- Breathability, comfort, and safety are critical.
- If personal protective equipment (PPE) is required to perform a work task, that requirement takes priority over masking for source control. Some, but not all masks provide both functions.
- Ensure masks do not introduce a new work hazard e.g. entanglement in machinery, impairing vision, causing overheating, interfering with communication.

Assessing worker risk of exposure to COVID-19

- For non-healthcare workers, 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 to others, 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)
 - **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, and when used by all, it protects everyone. If implementing masking for source control:
 - Note it is one measure in a [broad strategy](#) to reduce the risk of COVID-19.
 - 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 an 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 make, use, and care for cloth masks.
 - Refer to [When and How to Wear a Mask](#) 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 October 19, 2021.