FAQs for Using Non-Medical Masks

For more comprehensive information on the use of non-medical masks, please refer to COVID-19: Guidance for Using Non-Medical Face Masks [1].

For the purpose of these FAQs, “non-medical mask” refers to various forms of self-made or commercial, disposable or reusable masks or face coverings made of cloth, other textiles or other materials. A non-medical mask is preferred over a bandana, scarf, etc., and in some circumstances, may be required.

What is meant by "non-medical masks"?

A “non-medical mask” refers to various forms of self-made or commercial, disposable or reusable masks or face coverings made of cloth, other textiles or other materials.

What do I do if I feel sick?

If you are sick, stay home.

Employees should follow their department’s process for reporting absences and complete the Self-Declaration Form [2] on the University’s website.

Students should inform their course instructor about any missed work and contact Student Health Services for guidance at x 52131 to speak with the nurse. Further information is available on the Student Wellness website [3].

When do I need to wear a non-medical mask?

Non-medical masks are required when physical distancing (staying 2 metres or 6 feet away) from others is not possible or predictable. This includes research spaces, hallways, common areas, public spaces and washrooms.

Why do I need to wear a non-medical mask?

When physical distancing is challenging or not possible, face coverings are an additional tool that can reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

“I feel confident in my immune system” and “I’m not sick”, why should I be required to wear a non-medical mask?

As of June 8, 2020, Public Health agencies state the following:

1. There is evidence of community transmission of COVID-19 in Ontario, including in the jurisdiction of the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Unit. Additionally, as of June 12, 2020, the Medical Office of Health of the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Unit issued an order requiring face coverings be worn in commercial establishments.
2. COVID-19 can be transmitted from persons who have minimal or no signs or symptoms of illness.
3. When worn properly, a person wearing a non-medical mask can reduce the spread of his or her own infectious respiratory droplets.

Without any signs or symptoms of illness, you can be infected with the virus and transmitting it to others who might be more at risk of getting an infection and developing severe complications. We ask everyone at the University of
Guelph to play an important role in helping to prevent others, especially vulnerable populations, from getting or spreading the COVID-19 virus.

**Are non-medical masks a safe and effective way to prevent COVID-19?**

Non-medical masks alone will not prevent the spread of COVID-19. You must consistently and strictly adhere to other preventative measures such as:

- proper hand hygiene;
- respiratory etiquette when coughing or sneezing;
- and physical distancing whenever possible.

When worn properly, a person wearing a non-medical mask can reduce the spread of his or her own infectious respiratory droplets.

Non-medical masks do not provide complete protection against viral particles because of a potential loose fit and the materials used but are shown to be more effective than not using a non-medical mask at all.

**Who should not wear a non-medical mask?**

People whose ability to breathe is inhibited in any way by the face covering, or people that have any other diagnosed medical reasons that prevent them from wearing a non-medical mask safely. More information can be found through WDG Public Health Class Order [4].

**What should I do if I can’t wear a mask due to a medical condition?**

If you are an employee, please contact Occupational Health and Wellness at ohw@uoguelph.ca [5], or if you are a student, please contact Student Health Services [6].

**What happens if I don’t want to wear a non-medical face mask, is it mandatory?**

The use of a non-medical face mask is mandatory if 2-metre physical distancing is not possible or predictable unless you have a trouble breathing or have a diagnosed medical condition that impacts your ability to wear the mask.

**What type of non-medical masks should be worn?**

Non-medical face masks do not have to be fancy or expensive but must cover the mouth, nose and chin in order to provide a barrier that limits the transmission of infectious respiratory droplets. They can include disposable, cloth, or homemade, as appropriate for the workspace.

If you are working with hazardous materials (e.g. biohazards, chemicals, or nuclear substances, etc.), disposable masks are to be used unless a respirator (e.g., N95 filtering facepiece, half facepiece or full facepiece) is required as part of assigned personal protective equipment and has been approved for performing the work safely.

**Can I wear a bandana or scarf in place of a non-medical mask?**

A non-medical mask that is dedicated to be used to cover your nose, mouth and chin is preferred and, in some
circumstances, may be required. Employees should contact their supervisor if they are unsure of what is expected. Students should contact Student Wellness with further questions.

What about face shields?

As of June 17, 2020, Public Health agencies have not recommended face shields as a substitute for non-medical masks. However, there is evidence that face shields may provide some protection for eyes, nose, and mouth for the wearer.

Face shields do not provide full coverage of the mouth, nose and chin. However, a face shield is better than no non-medical mask, especially for those whose ability to breathe in any way is inhibited by a face covering or for people that have a diagnosed medical reason they cannot wear a non-medical mask safely but may be able to wear a shield.

Contact Environmental Health and Safety at ehs@uoguelph.ca [7], to discuss the use of face shields as necessary. For any medical concerns, contact Occupational Health and Wellness at ohw@uoguelph.ca [5].

Will the University be providing non-medical masks?

The University has secured a limited supply of non-medical masks that can be purchased by departments from the Physical Resources Stockroom [8].

Individuals are also permitted to wear their own non-medical mask provided it is appropriate for the workplace and in good condition (e.g. properly laundered, not torn or tattered).

When working with hazardous materials disposable masks will be required.

How often should I launder a cloth or non-medical mask?

It’s recommended to wash your reusable non-medical mask after each use. You can wash it with you regular laundry on the warmest water suitable for the material, and dry on the highest heat setting or air dry, including putting it in direct sunlight if possible. Disposable masks should not be washed. Please refer to WDG Public Health [9], for more in-depth laundering practices.

What if I forget my non-medical mask at home?

The University will have limited supplies available if you forget your non-medical mask at home and you will be required to wear a University supplied mask. Please connect with your supervisor.

Should people wear surgical masks or N95s?

Due to supply concerns during COVID-19, surgical masks and N95s should be preserved for health-care workers whenever possible, unless it is required for the performance of your job duties. N95s require fit-testing and approval by EHS.

What do I do if someone in my area is not wearing a non-medical mask and cannot maintain physical distancing?

Not all people are able to wear a non-medical mask.
In some cases, there may be suitable alternatives, however, if non-medical masks are required in the performance of your job duties where physical distancing cannot be maintained, and someone in your area is not wearing a non-medical mask, reposition yourself to maintain a 2m distance and ask them to put on a mask. If they do not put on a mask or you have further concerns, please address them with your supervisor.

**Do I still need to stay at least two metres (six feet) away from people if wearing a non-medical mask?**

Yes, the use of a non-medical face mask is not a substitute for physical distancing which must be adhered to wherever possible. Wearing a non-medical mask is an important additional measure when physical distancing is not possible or predictable.

**Can I remove my non-medical mask if physical distancing can be maintained?**

Yes – if physical distancing is maintained, a non-medical mask is not required. For example, masks are not required when eating, drinking, working in a personal space or working outdoors when physical distancing is possible and predictable.

Please follow the guidance provided by [COVID-19: Guidance for Using Non-Medical Face Masks](https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/covid-19-guidance-using-non-medical-face-masks) for proper removal and disposal or storage of your mask.

**What is the proper way to safely put on and remove a non-medical mask?**

The University’s [COVID-19: Guidance for Using Non-Medical Face Masks](https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/covid-19-guidance-using-non-medical-face-masks) outlines the appropriate steps for putting on and removing a face mask.

**Will non-medical mask requirements be enforced?**

Yes. All members of the University community will be required to wear non-medical face masks within these parameters. Members of the University community who demonstrate continued non-compliance with this directive may be asked to leave campus. Supervisors will be enforcing these requirements with their employees, in consultation with HR and FASR. Employees who fail to properly utilize non-medical masks when required to do so may be subject to disciplinary action. Faculty advisors and lab managers will similarly be monitoring compliance amongst the student body.

**Source URL:** https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/about-hr/environmental-health-safety-ehs/ehs-programs-policies-guidelines-and-forms/ehs-2

**Links**

[1] https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/covid-19-guidance-using-non-medical-face-masks
[5] mailto:ohw@uoguelph.ca
[6] https://wellness.uoguelph.ca/health/
[7] mailto:ehs@uoguelph.ca
[8] https://www.pr.uoguelph.ca/covid-19-personal-hygiene-supplies-and-physical-space-considerations