

COVID-19: Considerations for Face Coverings and Face Shields

In accordance with the Return-to-Campuses Steering Committee's communication on June 17, 2020, face coverings (e.g., non-medical masks) must be worn by those who come to the University of Guelph campuses or research stations when maintaining two metres of physical distance is not possible or predictable. This decision on face coverings aligns with the [class order issued by the Medical Officer of Health for the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph \(WDG\) Health Unit](#) [1].

The class order defines a face covering as “a **medical mask** or a **non-medical mask** or **other face coverings such as a bandana, a scarf or cloth that covers the mouth, nose, and chin** ensuring a barrier that limits the transmission of infectious respiratory droplets”.

The Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) department recommends that all employees wear either a **disposable or cloth non-medical mask**. If employees have difficulties wearing a cloth mask, they are encouraged to try disposable non-medical masks, such as the ones available at the [Physical Resources Stockroom](#) [2], which may be lighter in weight and easier to breathe through than the cloth masks.

Medical masks (e.g., surgical masks) are not recommended as they are being conserved for use in healthcare settings. Other face covering options listed in the order, such as bandanas or scarves, tend to be more variable in their designs and materials and less protective than non-medical masks; however, they may be considered as an alternative for employees who have difficulties wearing a non-medical mask. According to the information from [WDG Public Health](#) [3], the individual, who wears a bandana as a face covering option, should fold/tie it so there are at least two-three layers of fabric covering the mouth and nose and secure it snugly to the face. Mouth shields are not a suitable face covering option as they do not fit snugly around the mouth, nose and chin. Mouth shields allow infectious respiratory droplets to spread outside the shield, and do not help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Masks with valves are also not suitable for this reason.

The University of Guelph recognizes that some employees may not be able to wear a face covering for medical reasons. The employees who have a medical condition that impacts their ability to wear a face covering need to contact Occupational Health and Wellness (OHW) at ohw@uoguelph.ca [4] and notify their supervisor. Please note that employees are not required to disclose their specific medical condition to their supervisor.

If OHW determines that the employee is unable to wear a non-medical mask or any other face covering options, an alternative to a face covering will be considered including, but not be limited to, the use of a face shield and/or an appropriate workplace accommodation. It should be noted that face shields are currently recognized by Public Health sources (including [WDG Public Health](#) [5] and [Public Health Ontario](#) [6]) as “not an equal substitute for face coverings” but “better than nothing” alternative in certain circumstances (e.g., for those who cannot wear the face covering safely).

According to the Public Health sources, the limitations of the face shields, compared to face coverings, are as follows:

- The face shield does not filter respirator droplets expelled or inhaled by the wearer.
- It does not fully cover the mouth, nose, and chin of the wearer.
- It is thought to provide less protection for others as the respiratory droplets from the wearer may escape around the sides of the face shield.

Should a face shield be recommended to an employee by OHW, the following conditions need to be met:

- Face shields must cover the forehead, extend below the chin and cover the sides of the face.
- If the job task requires Canadian Standards Association (CSA)-approved safety glasses a face shield that is not CSA-approved must not be used as a substitute.
- If the job task requires CSA-approved goggles, a face shield should not be used as a substitute even if CSA-approved.

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- The material used for the visor (i.e., part of the face shield that covers the face) needs to be impenetrable by splashes, sprays, and spatter of body fluids.
- Wearing the face shield must not create a health hazard (e.g., skin irritation, allergic reaction, etc.) or a safety hazard (e.g., poor visibility, sharp edges, etc.) of its own.
- The face shield must be adequately replaced, cleaned, and/or disinfected.

[Physical Resources Stockroom](#) [2] has a supply of reusable face shields that can be reused following appropriate disinfection.

The information in this document is current as of December 15, 2020 and subject to change pending the future guidelines from the Public Health.

For any concerns or inquiries related to COVID-19 and working safely, please contact Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) at ehs@uoguelph.ca [7] or Occupational Health and Wellness (OHW) at ohw@uoguelph.ca [4].

Source URL: <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/about-hr/environmental-health-safety-ehs/ehs-programs-policies-guidelines-and-forms/ehs-1>

Links

[1] <https://www.wdgpulichealth.ca/your-health/covid-19-information-public/section-22-orders>

[2] <https://www.pr.uoguelph.ca/covid-19-personal-hygiene-supplies-and-physical-space-considerations>

[3] <https://wdgpulichealth.ca/your-health/covid-19-information-public/face-coverings>

[4] <mailto:ohw@uoguelph.ca>

[5] <https://www.wdgpulichealth.ca/your-health/covid-19-information-public/face-coverings-class-order-and-faqs#faceshields>

[6] <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/main/2020/07/covid-19-face-shields-source-control.pdf?la=en>

[7] <mailto:ehs@uoguelph.ca>