

GUIDANCE FACEMASKS

PURPOSE

To support Te Marae Ora Cook Islands Ministry of Health (Te Marae Ora) recommendations regarding the use of face masks and what to consider when selecting a face mask, how to wear (put on and take off), store, wash, and make a face mask. This guidance is designed to strengthen public health measures to limit the transmission of infectious agents through respiratory droplets or aerosol including those that cause Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

RECOMMENDATION

Te Marae Ora recommends wearing a face mask if unwell, in public, crowded or enclosed spaces. Wearing a face mask is not 100% effective in protecting you from diseases that are spread through respiratory droplets or aerosol, like COVID-19, therefore public health measures should continue to be used e.g. regular hand washing and physical distancing (2 metres).

SELECTING A FACE MASK

When selecting a face mask, ensure the following:

- A fabric/reusable face mask should have three layers
- Your face mask should cover your mouth and nose.
- Your face mask should fit snugly against the sides of your face, with no gaps.
- Avoid wearing a face mask made from hard to breathe material e.g. vinyl
- If you wear glasses, choose a mask that fits closely over your nose, or a mask with a nose wire to limit fogging.

WEARING A FACE MASK

General Considerations

- Your face mask should be changed or disinfected every 2-4 hours otherwise germs/dirt will accumulate on it and you can breathe it in.
- Face masks should not be worn by children under age 2 or anyone who has trouble breathing, or unable to remove a face mask without assistance.
- If your face mask becomes wet, it needs to be changed to a dry one.
- Wearing a face mask with a valve or vent will not protect you from infection.
- Check for holes, tears, or rips in your face mask before wearing it.
- Surgical masks and N95/P2 masks and respirators should be reserved for public-facing healthcare workers and other emergency or frontline responders.

How to put on a face mask safely

- Never share your face mask with others and ensure it is clean before you use it.
- Before putting on your face mask, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- If you are using a surgical face mask:
 - Check which side of the face mask is the top. Look for the side of the face mask with a stiff bendable edge that is meant to mould to the shape of your nose.
 - Check which side of the face mask is the front. The coloured side is usually the front and should face away from you, while the white side touches your face.

- If you are using a fabric/reusable face mask:
 - Check which side of the face mask is the front. The coloured or patterned side is usually the front and should face away from you.
- Hold the face mask by the ear loops and place a loop around each ear.
- Mould or pinch the top edge of the face mask to fit the shape of nose.
- Make sure your face mask is secure and covers your nose, mouth and chin.
- Your face mask should be comfortable and allow you to breathe easily.

How to take off a face mask safely

- Before removing your face mask, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Avoid touching the front of the face mask as it is contaminated. Only touch the loops.
- To remove your face mask, hold an ear loop and gently lift and remove the face mask.
- Pull the face mask away from your face and be careful not to touch your eyes, nose and mouth when removing your face mask.

If you are using a surgical face mask:

- Put the face mask in the rubbish bin.

If you are using a fabric/reusable face mask:

- Fold the outside corners together and place the face mask in the washing machine or hand-wash.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

How NOT to wear a face mask

- Don't touch the front of the face mask. If you do, wash or sanitise your hands.
- Don't push your face mask under your chin to rest on your neck, even to drink.
- Don't wear the face mask below your nose or until it covers just the tip of your nose.
- Don't hang your face mask from one ear.
- Don't wear your face mask on your elbow or on your forehead.
- Don't remove your face mask when you are talking to others.

Temporary removal of a face mask

Your face mask should remain on if unwell, in public, crowded or enclosed spaces. There are times where you may need to remove your face mask temporarily. Remember to wash or sanitise your hands before removing your face mask and when putting it back on.

You can remove your face mask for a short period of time for the following reasons:

- When you need to eat or drink
- If you need to take medicine
- If you need to avoid harm or injury, either to yourself or others e.g. get somebody's attention about a danger, choking hazard
- If you need to receive treatment or services
- If you are asked to do so by someone who will find it difficult to communicate with you e.g. hearing impaired
- If you are asked to do so at the air/sea ports, bank, post office, or shop for identification purposes
- If it is raining and you cannot prevent your face mask from getting wet
- If your mask is likely to get wet e.g. through strenuous exercise
- If you are outside and do not come within 2 metres of others

STORING A FACE MASK

How to store wet or dirty fabric/reusable face masks

- If your face mask is wet or dirty, keep it in a sealed plastic bag until you wash it.
- Wash wet or dirty masks as soon as possible.
- How to store your face mask when going to the bathroom, drinking or eating
- Place your face mask on a clean paper towel. The front part should be facing down with the loops placed away from the inside.
- If you do not have a clean paper towel, store your face mask in a clean paper bag.
- Put your face mask back on as soon as you return from the bathroom, finish eating or drinking.
- When eating or drinking, keep your face mask on until you are ready to eat and only put it back on once you are finished eating or drinking. Avoid putting on and taking off the face mask between bites.

WASHING A FABRIC/REUSABLE FACE MASK

While single-use face masks are preferred, it is not always practical nor available. Fabric/reusable face masks need to be washed and sanitised between wears.

How to wash by washing machine

- Your face mask can be washed with your regular laundry.
- Use regular laundry detergent and use the hot water setting for sufficient cleaning.
- How to wash by hand
- Wash your face mask with tap water and laundry detergent or soap.
- Rinse thoroughly with clean water to remove detergent or soap.

How to dry a face mask

- Once clean, the face mask should be thoroughly dried on a clothesline or dryer.
- Hang your face mask in direct sunlight to dry completely.

MAKING A FABRIC/REUSABLE FACE MASK

General considerations

- Simple face masks can be made at home using washable and breathable fabric.
- A fabric face mask should have three layers of fabric to offer better protection:
 - Outer layer – hydrophobic material e.g. polypropylene or polyester to repel droplets
 - Middle layer – polypropylene fabric e.g. synthetic, non-woven, water-resistant material
 - Inner layer – hydrophilic material e.g. cotton to absorb droplets
- A white cotton inner layer is recommended to identify when the face mask is soiled/wet.
- The middle layer can be inserted into a pocket between the inner and outer layer and act as a filter.
- There are four sizes: Small (<11 cm), Medium (10-12cm), Large (11-13cm), Extra-large (>12.5cm)

How to sew a face mask

- You will need the following materials:
 - Three 25cm x 15cm rectangles of cotton fabric
 - Two 15cm pieces of elastic (or rubber bands, string, cloth strips or hair ties)
 - Needle and thread (or bobby pin)
 - Scissors
 - Sewing machine
- Cut out three 25cm by 15cm rectangles of cotton fabric. Use tightly woven cotton, such as quilting fabric or cotton sheets. Stack the two rectangles; sew the mask as if it is a single piece of fabric. Leave a space between the inner and outer layer, forming a pocket, to insert the middle layer fabric (filter).
- Fold over the long sides 0.6cm and hem. Then fold the double layer of fabric over 1.2cm along the

short sides and stitch down.

- Run a 15cm length of 0.3cm wide elastic through the wider hem on each side of the mask. These will be the ear loops. Use a large needle or bobby pin to thread it through. Tie the ends tight. If you don't have elastic, alternatives include hair ties or elastic head bands.
- Gently pull the elastic so that the knots are tucked inside the hem. Gather the sides of the mask on the elastic and adjust so the face mask fits your face. Then securely stitch the elastic in place to keep from slipping.

How to make a non-sewn face mask

- You will need the following materials:
 - Washable and breathable fabric (cut approximately 50cm x 50cm)
 - Rubber bands (or hair ties)
 - Scissors (if you are cutting your own cloth)
- You can use an old t-shirt, bandana or scarf for this.
- Firstly, fold the washable and breathable fabric in half.
- Fold top down. Fold bottom up.
- Place rubber bands or hair ties about 15cm apart.
- Fold to the middle and tuck.
- Make sure your mask fits snugly but comfortably to your face.

DEFINING PUBLIC, CROWDED OR ENCLOSED SPACES

Public, crowded, or enclosed spaces are places that are shared by other members of the community and where physical distancing (2 metres) is not possible. Such places include public transport, schools, churches, supermarkets, shops, bars, restaurants, cafes, health clinics, banks, sports centres, gyms, hair-dressers and salons, cinemas etc.

A face mask is not required to be worn when outdoors and alone, or in situations where your face mask is likely to get wet e.g. strenuous exercise, or when travelling in a private vehicle alone or with other close family/household members.

PUBLIC-FACING WORKERS

Public-facing workers such as Te Marae Ora and frontline/border staff should wear surgical masks while at work especially when in close proximity to members of the public or other staff. N95/P2 face masks should be limited to high risk exposure settings as advised by Te Marae Ora.

RESOURCES

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