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Archived information is provided for reference and research purposes. Please refer to [Respiratory Infectious Diseases: Health and Safety Resources](#) for the latest guidance.



### Introduction

From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, an enormous amount of information has been communicated about the virus and how to keep ourselves and our workplaces safe. Here are some answers to commonly asked questions about COVID-19.

### What control measures can be used to protect against COVID-19?

Exposure to infectious diseases such as COVID-19 is a workplace hazard. Employers have a legal obligation to protect their employees and other persons in the workplace from exposure to COVID-19. As for other workplace hazards, preventive control measures must be used to eliminate or reduce the risk of exposure as much as possible.

Hazard controls (visually described in this [COVID-19 Hierarchy of Control infographic](#)) can be grouped into several categories: elimination and substitution, engineering controls, administrative controls, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

It is recommended to implement multiple [preventative practices for individuals](#) in a layered approach:

- physical distancing of the greatest distance possible (at least 2 metres)
- properly wearing a well-constructed, well-fitting mask
- frequent hand hygiene with hand washing and alcohol-based sanitizer
- respiratory etiquette for sneezing and coughing
- frequent [cleaning and disinfection](#) of high-touch surfaces
- good [ventilation in indoor](#) spaces and vehicles
- daily screening for symptoms and potential exposures
- isolation if symptomatic, or quarantine if potentially exposed
- minimizing non-essential in-person interactions
- keeping essential in-person interaction as few and brief as possible
- staying educated and informed from reliable sources

To help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19, it is recommended that the workplace perform a [COVID-19 Risk Assessment](#) and prepare a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#).

A COVID-19 risk assessment identifies the likelihood of COVID-19 exposure in the workplace. Risk of transmission increases:

- in closed spaces with poor ventilation
- in crowded places

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- during in-person, frequent, or extended interactions (e.g., close-range conversations, touching, long work shifts) with people outside of the immediate household
- in settings where there is singing, shouting or heavy breathing (e.g., from exertion)

Risk assessments also assess the severity of the outcomes or consequences of COVID-19 transmission (e.g., increased absenteeism, business closures).

A COVID-19 safety plan should include written procedures and policies for how to implement the health and safety measures against COVID-19, as well as how to respond to a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case.

Your [jurisdictional OHS regulator](#), [jurisdictional worker compensation board](#), local [public health authority](#), and the [Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#) have specific rules that must be followed, as well as best-practice guidelines and recommendations.

As the pandemic evolves it is recommended to frequently check the rules that apply to your jurisdiction and workplace. Update policies and procedures as needed.

These policies and procedures should be communicated to anyone who could be affected by COVID-19, such as employees, customers and clients, visitors, and contractors.

Communications should be accessible, using languages and formats that can be easily understood by the target audience. Examples include pictographic posters on doors and bulletin boards, e-mails, webpage notices, social media posts, pre-screening forms, meetings, and formal employee training sessions.

Visit these links for more information on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace:

[PHAC - How businesses and employees can stay safe while operating during COVID-19](#)

[PHAC - Risk mitigation tool for workplaces/businesses operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[CCOHS - Protect Yourself and Others from COVID-19](#)

[CCOHS - COVID-19 Health and Safety Planning for Employers](#)

[CCOHS - COVID-19 Prevention for Workers](#)

[CCOHS - COVID-19 Health and Safety Resources](#)

### Who do I contact to report unsafe work conditions or practices related to COVID-19?

If a workplace is not following the COVID-19 prevention requirements for their industry or jurisdiction, there may be cause for concern.

Concerns about COVID-19 should first be discussed directly with the supervisor, the employer, the health and safety committee (HSC) or health and safety representative, and the union if there is one.

If not resolved, further concerns and complaints about unsafe work conditions or practices related to COVID-19 should be reported to the same Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulatory bodies as for other workplace hazards. Contact the [jurisdictional OHS regulator](#) for your Canadian province or territory. If the workplace is federally regulated, contact the [Canadian Federal Labour Program](#) at **1-800-641-4049**.

You might also wish to consult with your local [public health authority](#).

### Should I report to work? I, or an immediate household member has a pre-existing condition (age, medical) that increases the risk of developing severe COVID-19 symptoms.

Deciding whether or not to report to work (at the physical workplace) during the pandemic can be difficult. CCOHS cannot evaluate your particular workplace and health situation, or advise you if you should return to work; however, here are some steps you can follow to help make this decision:

Talk directly with your employer about your concerns. There may be additional control measures that can be applied, or alternative work arrangements such as a different role or working remotely. You and your employer must work together to identify any accommodations for a safe return to work. If the employer has taken all reasonable precautions to ensure your health and safety, then you are obligated to report or return to work.

Your health and safety committee / representative or your union can also provide you with guidance and support.

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Speak with your doctor, physician, or medical specialist. They can help you to evaluate your health risks. You may need to provide some information about your medical condition to support your request for accommodation or leave.

If you are unable to work due to COVID-19, ask your employer about your options for a paid or unpaid leave of absence, or you might be eligible for [government financial assistance](#).

If you must work and have concerns about bringing COVID-19 home to a vulnerable household member, you might consider additional control measures at home.

### If a COVID-19 exposure is confirmed in the workplace, what information is allowed or obligated to be shared?

If a workplace has a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, they should contact the local [public health authority](#) for instructions and assistance. Each jurisdiction may have different instructions on what to do in the event of a workplace exposure. The person showing symptoms should immediately self-isolate at home. Co-workers may notice their absence. Management should only confirm the absence and not provide additional private details.

The privacy and confidentiality of the symptomatic person(s) must be protected by the employer and by the public health authorities. For example, when a positive case at a school or a grocery store is communicated to the general public, the personal information of the symptomatic person(s) is not disclosed. Within a workplace, the privacy and confidentiality of the symptomatic employee(s) must also be protected, even when communicating the exposure to employees and other workplace parties.

If the local public health authority performs further contact tracing, they will identify and notify anyone who was exposed to the symptomatic person. This tracing could include co-workers, customers, clients, visitors, contractors, friends, and family members. These persons may also be required to quarantine, isolate (if symptomatic), and/or be tested for COVID-19.

The local public health authority may also provide instructions to the employer on further actions to take, such as ordering a temporary closure for cleaning and disinfection. If the exposure was determined to have occurred in the workplace, then the [jurisdictional OHS regulator](#) and [jurisdictional worker compensation board](#) may also need to be notified, as for other workplace illnesses and injuries.

### If I was home sick with confirmed or presumed COVID-19, do I need a negative clearance test before being allowed to return to work?

Each province may have different guidance for COVID-19 testing and determining when the quarantine / isolation period ends.

The workplace sector, exposure situation (source, timing), and symptoms may also impact the testing and quarantine or isolation requirements.

Consult with your local [public health authority](#) to determine if a negative clearance test is required in your particular situation.

### What is COVID-19 screening and is it required?

Screening is the process of asking questions to determine if a person may have COVID-19 or may have been recently exposed to COVID-19. The questions are typically about [symptoms](#), recent [travel](#) history, and exposure to people who have been diagnosed with or are suspected to have COVID-19.

Some provincial and territorial governments have included an obligatory screening requirement in their pandemic legislation. Verify the current requirements of your local [public health authority](#) to ensure you are in compliance.

Screening will determine if a person:

- needs further assessment or testing for COVID-19
- will be allowed to enter a workplace to work or to visit
- will be allowed to receive services where in-person interactions may be required

Workplaces should follow the screening protocols and questions required by their local health authorities. A tool or template may be provided by the local health authority, or the workplace may need to create one.

The screening tool could be a hard copy or e-mailed form, an online questionnaire, an app, or a worker web-portal. The [CCOHS COVID-19 Screening Tool](#) is an example of a hard copy form. The [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) is an online screening tool available to all residents of Canada.

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Employees should be screened before entering the workplace and throughout their workday. Contractors and visitors should also be screened before being allowed into the premises. Parents may be asked to use a school screening tool to determine if their child should go to school that day.

Record the names and contact information of all workers, customers, clients, etc. to assist with contact tracing if needed. Make sure that privacy is protected, stored in a secure manner, and the list is only used for contact tracing purposes.

Screening is a useful practice, but it has some limitations:

- Not all persons will answer honestly, fearing loss of work or services. Consider providing information on [reducing stigma](#), and ensuring that employees understand employer and government leaves of absence policies and programs.
- It is a snapshot of 'today', and so must be repeated daily and throughout the day if possible.
- Some people with COVID-19 have mild or no symptoms. Asymptomatic COVID-19 positive people will not be discovered by screening efforts.

## I'm working from home because of COVID-19, what if I get sick or injured?

Even though you are working from home, the employer is still responsible for your health and safety while performing work. This responsibility includes office ergonomics and exposure to other hazards that are part of your work which may include electrical, slips trips and falls, emergency response, and psychosocial concerns such as loneliness and isolation.

*If you become sick or injured while working, notify your supervisor and employer immediately.*

Discuss with your employer if you have any health and safety concerns. If it is unsafe to work, talk to your supervisor, health and safety committee or representative, and/or union.

Ergonomics might be a challenge in a temporary home office. Kitchen tables and chairs may not be ideal for sustained sitting and computer use. If necessary, request a home office ergonomic assessment which may be available by video conferencing.

Assess your home-office workspace during the initial setup and at regular intervals while continuing to work from home to prevent hazards and injuries from developing.

Consider all of your usual work activities. Due to structural or technological limitations of your home, it may not be possible to safely perform all of your usual work tasks from a home office. Some tasks and processes may need to be modified. Discuss your concerns with your supervisor.

Continue to follow all safe work procedures. The employer should communicate with you regularly, including any new practices and policies that will affect or assist you while working from home.

For more information about working from home and setting up an ergonomic home office, visit these links:

[Government of Canada - Working Remotely](#)

[Canadian Psychological Association: Working From Home](#)

[CCOHS - COVID-19 Tip Sheet: Working from Home](#)

[CCOHS - Telework / Telecommuting](#)

[CCOHS - Telework and Home Office Health and Safety Guide](#)

[CCOHS - Working Alone](#)

[CCOHS - Ergonomics](#)

[CCOHS - Office Ergonomics](#)

## Where can I find mental health resources?

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is having an impact on mental health, such as physical and mental symptoms of increased stress, anxiety, and depression. Changes to our normal routines, social and physical isolation, financial stress, and worries about catching or spreading the virus are all contributing factors.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact your local hospital, call 911 immediately, or contact a [Crisis Centre](#) in your area.

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[Crisis Services Canada](#) enables callers anywhere in Canada to access crisis support by phone, in French or English: toll-free **1-833-456-4566** (available 24/7)

Talk to someone trained in mental health first aid.

Some workplaces have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that provides access to mental health consultation and services.

Contact your local public health or community resources that offer mental health services.

Access online mental health information resources:

[CCOHS - Mental Health](#)

[Guarding Minds at Work](#)

[Wellness Together Canada](#)

[Government of Canada - Mental health and wellness](#)

[Government of Canada - Taking care of your mental and physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Québec - Stress, anxiety and depression associated with the coronavirus COVID-19 disease](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#)

[Canadian Psychological Association](#)

[Kids Help Phone](#)

[World Health Organization \(WHO\) - Healthy At Home](#)

## Masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

### What is the difference between N95 respirators, surgical/medical masks, and non-medical masks?

Each type of mask is designed for a specific purpose:

**Respirators** such as N95 masks protect the wearer against exposure to airborne particles and aerosols in the surrounding environment when fitted and worn correctly. They also help to block exhaled respiratory droplets. Respirator masks are regulated by the government and must meet specific test and manufacturing control standards. The applicable standard codes should be marked on the packaging label and/or device.

Verify with your [jurisdictional OHS regulator](#) and applicable OHS regulations if respirators are required for your particular workplace, job activities, and potential hazard exposures. Respirator masks used in the workplace must be properly fit tested to the user, who must also receive training on the proper fit, use, inspection, and care of their respirator.

**Medical/Surgical Masks** are a barrier to spreading respiratory droplets when the wearer breathes, talks, shouts, sings, sneezes, or coughs. Unlike N95 respirators, they are not specifically designed to filter particles and aerosols from the surrounding environment.

Medical/Surgical masks are regulated by the government and must meet specific test and manufacturing control standards. The applicable standard codes should be marked on the packaging label.

Medical/Surgical masks are most commonly used in healthcare settings but can also be purchased at many stores. They are typically made from lightweight pleated fabric, coloured on the outer surface (e.g., blue, yellow, or pink) and white on the inner surface, with a metal nose-clip and elastic ear loops. These masks are generally single use and should be changed and discarded when they become damp or soiled.

**Non-medical masks** (NMMs) limit the spread of respiratory droplets when the wearer breathes, talks, shouts, sings, sneezes, or coughs. They are most commonly used in the community and workplace along with other [personal preventive practices](#) (e.g., physical distancing, hand hygiene) to help prevent the spread of viruses. Non-medical masks are not regulated or tested; however, they do help to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 when they are well-constructed, well-fitted, and are properly worn, handled, and cared for.

Wear a non-medical mask when you are:

- required by your employer or local public health authority
- in crowded places or closed spaces with poor ventilation
- out in public and you might come into close contact with others

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- interacting with people from outside your immediate household

When buying or sewing a fabric non-medical mask, the materials and design can make a difference in how effective it will be at limiting respiratory droplet spread. PHAC recommends three-layer masks. The inner and outer layers should be tightly woven material fabric, such as cotton or linen; the third (middle) layer should be a filter-type fabric, such as non-woven polypropylene. If three-layer masks are unavailable, consider layering several single-layer masks. The mask should fit tightly over your nose, mouth and chin; a loose mask with gaps will be less effective. Make sure that the ear loops or head straps are secure.

Reusable fabric masks should be washed in hot soapy water and dried between each use, and when they become damp or soiled. Damaged masks will be less effective and should be discarded.

## BE AWARE:

- Counterfeit respirators that do not provide sufficient protection have been reported for sale. Ensure you only purchase from reputable vendors and manufacturers, and verify that the NIOSH approval number (for N95s) is legitimate. Visit [Government of Canada - Fraudulent and unauthorized N95 respirators may not protect consumers against COVID-19](#) for more information.
- Some single-use non-medical masks look like respirators or medical masks; however, they will not have the appropriate regulatory test standards marked on the packaging labels.
- Masks with air release valves are not effective at protecting others and are not recommended as they allow your exhaled air and respiratory droplets to escape from the mask.
- Neck warmers, bandanas, gaiters, and buffs also do not provide sufficient protection.

Visit these links for more detailed information about respirators, medical/surgical masks, and non-medical masks:

## PHAC:

[COVID-19 medical masks and respirators: Overview](#)

[COVID-19 medical masks and respirators: Information for health professionals](#)

[COVID-19 mask use: Advice for community settings](#)

[COVID-19 mask use: How to choose, use and care for a mask](#)

[COVID-19 mask use: How to put on, remove and clean a mask](#)

## CCOHS:

[Get the Facts on Masks](#)

[Video: How to choose a mask](#)

[Video: How to safely wear a mask](#)

[Video: How to care for a mask](#)

[Respirators, Surgical Masks, and Non-Medical Masks](#)

[Respirators - Respirators Versus Surgical Masks](#)

[Respirator Selection](#)

[Respirator Care](#)

[Respirators - Wearing a Respirator](#)

[Respiratory Protection Against Airborne Infectious Agents for Health Care Workers](#)

## Can KN95 respirators be used at work instead of N95 respirators?

During a pandemic, both medical-grade and commercial-grade N95 respirators may be in short supply globally. Existing stock might be prioritized for the medical and other front-line service sectors, or supply chain issues could result in shipment delays. If your workplace normally uses N95 respirators for protection against fine particulate matter but is having difficulty sourcing them, you may be able to use a different type as long as it provides at least the same level of respiratory protection.

Occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation may state specific requirements for respiratory protection, including references to respirator test standards for design, filtration, performance, and materials. For example, N95 respirators meet a US-NIOSH test standard, while KN95s meet a China test standard. Similar test standards exist for Europe, Australia, Japan, etc. [Respirators approved under standards used in other countries](#) may be acceptable for use in Canada, if the manufacturer can provide the evidence demonstrating testing to the appropriate standards.

Always check directly with your [jurisdictional OHS regulator](#) for the exact legal interpretation, and ask if respirators that meet a similar test standard may be safely used in your workplace for the type of work you are doing.

### **Do I have to wear a non-medical mask at work?**

Wearing non-medical masks may be mandated by local government or public health authorities, based on the local rate of infection and other factors.

Under occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation, the employer is responsible for taking all reasonable precautions to protect the health and safety of their workers. This duty may include requiring workers to wear a non-medical mask in the workplace, in addition to other COVID-19 [personal preventive practices](#) such as physical distancing and frequent hand hygiene.

Workers are also responsible for using any personal protective equipment PPE (such as respirators) and other safety equipment required by the employer to protect their health and safety.

A risk assessment should be performed by the employer with the health and safety committee or representative to determine where masks are required, and to ensure that the masks do not create any new safety hazards.

Some workers may have pre-existing medical conditions that make wearing a mask difficult. In these cases, the employer and the worker must work together to find a reasonable accommodation.

### **Can respirator masks be worn at work instead of non-medical masks?**

In workplaces where non-medical masks are required, some workers might ask their employer if they can wear a respirator mask instead.

There could be various reasons for this request:

- Seeking better respiratory protection than a non-medical mask can provide.
- As part of medical accommodation discussions.
- Increased availability and affordability of various respirator masks (N95, KN95, etc.) from retail sources.
- Personal fit, comfort, and appearance choices.

While this may seem like a simple substitution, the employer should first review potential issues. For example, are official fit testing and training still required for a respirator mask if it's being used as a substitute for a non-medical mask?

Consider that when a respirator is needed to protect a worker against an occupational hazard (e.g., particulate, chemical, biological), the occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations require that it be properly fit tested to the wearer. The wearer must also receive training on the proper fit, use, inspection, and care of their respirator. Even if the intent is to replace a mask with a lower protection level, the OHS requirements may still apply because the respirator is being used against a biological hazard in the workplace.

Here are some other questions the employer should address:

- If fit-testing is not performed, will the respirator mask provide the expected level of protection? The protection test standards are based on a correct fit with a good seal.
- If a worker becomes sick with COVID-19 at work, while wearing their own mask (of any kind), are there liability issues?
- Is the employer providing the masks used in the workplace?
- Is use of the employer-provided masks mandatory?
- If workers are allowed to use their own masks at work, should the employer first inspect and approve them for use?
- What are the claims and instructions on the mask packaging?
- Does the respirator meet Canadian test and manufacturing standards (or an approved international equivalent)?
- If required, does the employer know how to provide adequate respirator fit testing and training to their workers?
- Could workers become less diligent about other protective measures if wearing a respirator?

It is recommended that the employer review the applicable OHS regulations for respiratory protection and biological hazards, consult with their [jurisdictional OHS regulator](#), discuss with their health and safety committee or representative, and seek legal counsel if required.

NOTE: For people who choose to wear a respirator mask for personal use while in the community (i.e., only for non-occupational use), official fit testing is not required, and the manufacturer's instructions should be followed.

## Is it safe to wear a mask all day at work?

Masks are safe to wear for most people, and they help to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has provided [guidance on wearing masks](#) in the community and workplace, including information about [safety considerations](#) and [those who can't wear masks](#). If a worker has health-related concerns about wearing a mask at work, they should consult with a medical professional and discuss with their employer.

Posts have circulated on social media claiming that wearing a mask can result in oxygen deficiency or carbon dioxide intoxication. This claim is **FALSE** and has been debunked by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\) Mythbusters](#). While the air inside the mask may feel warm and humid, the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels are not affected. Learn more about [fact-checking COVID-19 information](#).

If performing heavy tasks or working in a hot or humid environment, workers may experience [heat stress](#), which is defined as the "net [overall] heat load to which a worker may be exposed from the combined contributions of metabolic heat, environmental factors (i.e., air temperature, humidity, air movement, and radiant heat), and clothing requirements."

Employers should have a workplace [heat stress control program](#) to assess and manage the risk of heat stress. For example, workers may require more frequent rest or water breaks during hot weather conditions.

Canadian occupational health and safety authorities generally use the Threshold Limit Values (TLVs) for heat as recommended by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists ([ACGIH](#)). Note: in some health and safety legislation these limits may also be referred to as Occupational Exposure Limits (OELs).

The ACGIH has published guidance\* on how to calculate heat stress exposure in units of WBGT (wet bulb globe temperature) degrees Celsius (°C). The calculation formulas include a 'clothing adjustment factor' for various listed clothing types, which may add 0 to +11 degrees Celsius (°C) to the final value.

While heavy or tightly woven work clothing may add to the worker's heat load, studies have found that face masks and coverings have a 'minimal effect on heat dissipation' for the whole body. However, because the skin of the face has many nerves and temperature receptors, the worker may still feel as if they are experiencing an [overall] increase in heat load, due to localized lack of heat loss from the face.

The ACGIH does "not recommend any adjustment for the use of face coverings" and does not list a clothing adjustment factor for face masks; however, every workplace is unique, so the employer could still choose to apply a clothing adjustment factor. It is recommended that the employer consult with their workplace health and safety committee or representative, and [jurisdictional OHS regulator](#).

\* Refer to the current ACGIH "TLVs® and BEIs®" and "Documentation of TLVs® and BEIs®" booklets for more detailed technical information.

For more information on Heat Stress, refer to these CCOHS OSH Answers:

[Temperature Conditions - Hot](#)  
[Temperature Conditions - Legislation](#)  
[Hot Environments - Control Measures](#)  
[Hot Environments - Health Effects and First Aid](#)  
[Humidex Rating and Work](#)  
[Thermal Comfort for Office Work](#)

## Can I wear a face shield instead of a mask?

[Face shields](#) should not replace the use of masks. They are useful for protecting the eyes, adding an additional layer of splash protection over a mask, and allowing full visibility of the wearers face. Face shields do not provide equivalent protection as respirator masks, medical / surgical masks, or non-medical masks. The large gaps at the sides and bottom of the face shield allow respiratory droplets and aerosols to flow away from the wearer unimpeded. They also do not protect the wearer from potentially inhaling infectious respiratory droplets and aerosols exhaled by others.

Visit [CCOHS - COVID-19: Using Face Shields](#) to learn more.

NOTE: If a visible face is needed for accessibility reasons (e.g., lip reading), consider using a single-use [transparent medical mask](#).

## What PPE should I be using for COVID-19?

The personal protective equipment (PPE) required for protection against COVID-19 will depend on the workplace setting and the type of work being done.

For example, in healthcare settings where the risk of respiratory aerosols and close or prolonged contact with infected individuals is higher, PPE may include respirators or surgical masks, face shields, goggles, gowns, aprons, and gloves.

Situations where PPE may be considered for protection from COVID-19 include:

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- Wearing gloves and other appropriate PPE as recommended by a chemical product's safe work instructions or Safety Data Sheet (SDS), when cleaning.
- Wearing disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids.
- If someone becomes symptomatic while at the workplace, they should wear a medical (surgical) mask if available. If not available, they should properly wear a well-constructed, well-fitting non-medical mask (if not already doing so).
- Where recommended or required by your local public health authorities.

In public settings, non-medical masks may be recommended or required. It is important to note that non-medical masks are not considered to be 'PPE', as they are not regulated or tested.

In all workplace settings, the PPE for existing occupational safety hazards and emergencies (other than COVID-19) should continue to be used, as directed by applicable laws and the employer.

The law is not always clear about [who pays for PPE](#). It depends on the jurisdiction, and in some jurisdictions, it depends on the type of PPE required. For more information about OHS legislation and the requirement to provide PPE, always check directly with your [jurisdictional OHS regulator](#) for the exact legal interpretation.

Visit these links for more information about PPE:

PHAC:

[Personal Protective Equipment \(COVID-19\): Overview](#)

CCOHS:

[COVID-19 and Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#)

[Designing an Effective PPE Program](#)

[Personal Protective Equipment](#)

[Chemical Protective Clothing – Glove Selection](#).

## Cleaning and Disinfecting

### Which cleaning and disinfecting products are best to use against COVID-19?

Health Canada has posted an [approved list of disinfectants](#) with evidence of efficacy against the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

Use a cleaning and disinfecting product with a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an 8-digit number assigned by Health Canada to products that are approved and safe for use in Canada. The DIN is printed on the container label.

If you have more questions, visit [Health Canada - COVID-19 Disinfectants, sanitizers, cleaners and soaps](#), or contact Health Canada's Natural and Non-prescription Health Products Directorate at [hc.nnhpd-dpsnso.sc@canada.ca](mailto:hc.nnhpd-dpsnso.sc@canada.ca)

Always follow the disinfectant manufacturer's precautions and safe use recommendations, and use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) if necessary.

### How do I make a bleach solution?

If approved cleaning products are in short supply, you can use a [diluted bleach solution](#) to disinfect high-touch hard surfaces.

Follow the directions on the label, or use these dilution ratios with 5% sodium hypochlorite bleach to give a 0.1 % sodium hypochlorite solution:

- 250 mL (1 cup) of water per 5 mL (1 teaspoon) bleach, or
- 1 litre of water (4 cups) per 20 mL (4 teaspoons) bleach

Note: Most household bleach products sold at retail stores are 3 to 5% sodium hypochlorite; however, some industrial sources are more concentrated. If you use a starting concentration of bleach greater than 5%, make sure to adjust the dilution measurement to get a 0.1% solution.

Safety Tips for Bleach:

- Always read the warning labels on household cleaning product containers. Refer to the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for WHMIS controlled hazardous chemicals.
- Always pour the bleach into the water, never the other way around.

- Never mix bleach with other chemicals such as glass cleaners, vinegar (acetic acid) and other acids, or products containing ammonia as this mixture can create deadly fumes.
- Bleach fumes can cause respiratory harm if inhaled. Make sure there is good ventilation in the room where mixing and using bleach. Open windows or turn exhaust fans on.
- Bleach is corrosive to skin and eyes:
  - Wear personal protective equipment such as rubber gloves and goggles.
  - Wash your hands with soap and water after handling bleach or diluted bleach.
  - Do not use bleach or diluted bleach to disinfect skin.
- Bleach is dangerous to ingest (swallow); keep it out of sight and reach of children.
- Bleach might damage or discolour some surfaces, consider testing a small area before cleaning the whole surface.

Visit [CCOHS - Working with Household \(Chlorine\) Bleach](#) for more safety tips.

## **What safety precautions should I take when using cleaning and disinfection products?**

Many cleaning and disinfection products have health and safety hazards. The workplace is obligated to provide workers with information and training on any hazardous chemicals they will be using. Always read the warning labels on household cleaning product containers. Refer to the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) controlled hazardous products.

Follow the listed safety precautions for:

- Ventilation (open windows and doors, increase HVAC fresh air intake)
- Storage and handling, including when different chemicals should not be stored together
- Protection from combustion sources (sparks, high heat, open flames)
- Emergency response (spills, fires, first aid)
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) such as:
  - eye protection (goggles, face shield)
  - skin protection (gloves, long sleeves, apron)
  - respiratory protection (masks, respirators)
  - footwear (boots, anti-slip or chemical resistant soles)
- Any other listed safety precautions

Visit these links for more information about working safely with chemicals:

[CCOHS - Chemical Hazards](#)

[CCOHS - Chemical Effects on the Body](#)

[CCOHS - WHMIS/GHS/\(M\)SDS](#)

[CCOHS - Designing an Effective PPE Program](#)

## **How should I clean and disinfect hard surfaces to help prevent the spread of COVID-19?**

Cleaning means to remove dirt from a surface, for example by wiping it down with a damp cloth or scrubbing the surface with soap and water.

Disinfecting means to apply a chemical to the surface that can kill infectious agents, such as bacteria and viruses.

- Use disposable or dedicated re-usable cloths for cleaning and disinfecting tasks
- Change the cloths daily or when they become visibly soiled
- Dirt on a surface will reduce the efficacy of a disinfectant, so clean dirty surfaces before applying disinfectant product
- Saturate a clean cloth with the disinfectant
- Reapply disinfectant to the cloth as needed and between different surfaces
- Apply enough disinfectant to leave a visible film on the surface

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- Disinfectants need a minimum contact time to effectively disinfect a surface. Allow the wetted surface to air dry or wipe off the solution after the required contact time has been reached.

Visit these links for more information about cleaning and disinfecting:

[PHAC - COVID-19: Cleaning and disinfecting](#)

[World Health Organization \(WHO\) - Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces in non-health care settings](#)

[CCOHS - Sanitation and Infection Control for Cleaning Staff](#)

[CCOHS - Standard Operating Procedure: Disinfection of Touch Points](#)

### How should I handle used cleaning materials?

Used cleaning materials like rags, cloths, sponges, and paper towels could be hazardous. They may still contain some cleaning chemical, and may also have collected SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) coronavirus particles from the hard surfaces and items being wiped down.

Be aware of potential coronavirus cross-contamination when handling, discarding, storing, or washing used cleaning materials. [Routine practices](#) are a set of infection control strategies and standards designed to protect workers from exposure to potential sources of infectious diseases.

Also follow the health and safety precautions for the chemical listed on the container warning label or [Safety Data Sheets \(SDS\)](#). For example, some alcohol-based products might be flammable, so do not expose the used materials to sources of sparks, high heat, or open flames.

For single-use materials like paper towels and gloves, discard them into a dedicated lined waste container with a lid. Do not mix with other kinds of waste or recycling.

For re-useable cleaning materials like sponges and rags, collect them in a dedicated container that is also disinfected frequently. Wash used materials in hot water with a cleaning detergent, then dry completely before re-using them.

## What is the difference between N95 respirators, surgical/medical masks, and non-medical masks?

Each type of mask is designed for a specific purpose:

**Respirators** such as N95 masks protect the wearer against exposure to airborne particles and aerosols in the surrounding environment when fitted and worn correctly. They also help to block exhaled respiratory droplets. Respirator masks are regulated by the government and must meet specific test and manufacturing control standards. The applicable standard codes should be marked on the packaging label and/or device.

Verify with your [jurisdictional OHS regulator](#) and applicable OHS regulations if respirators are required for your particular workplace, job activities, and potential hazard exposures. Respirator masks used in the workplace must be properly fit tested to the user, who must also receive training on the proper fit, use, inspection, and care of their respirator.

**Medical/Surgical Masks** are a barrier to spreading respiratory droplets when the wearer breathes, talks, shouts, sings, sneezes, or coughs. Unlike N95 respirators, they are not specifically designed to filter particles and aerosols from the surrounding environment.

Medical/Surgical masks are regulated by the government and must meet specific test and manufacturing control standards. The applicable standard codes should be marked on the packaging label.

Medical/Surgical masks are most commonly used in healthcare settings but can also be purchased at many stores. They are typically made from lightweight pleated fabric, coloured on the outer surface (e.g., blue, yellow, or pink) and white on the inner surface, with a metal nose-clip and elastic ear loops. These masks are generally single use and should be changed and discarded when they become damp or soiled.

**Non-medical masks** (NMMs) limit the spread of respiratory droplets when the wearer breathes, talks, shouts, sings, sneezes, or coughs. They are most commonly used in the community and workplace along with other [personal preventive practices](#) (e.g., physical distancing, hand hygiene) to help prevent the spread of viruses. Non-medical masks are not currently regulated or tested in Canada; however, they do help to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 when they are well-constructed, well-fitted, and are properly worn, handled, and cared for.

Wear a non-medical mask when you are:

- required by your employer or local public health authority
- in crowded places or closed spaces with poor ventilation

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- out in public and you might come into close contact with others
- interacting with people from outside your immediate household

When buying or sewing a fabric non-medical mask, the materials and design can make a difference in how effective it will be at limiting respiratory droplet spread. PHAC recommends three-layer masks:

The inner and outer layers should be tightly woven material fabric, such as cotton or linen; the third (middle) layer should be a filter-type fabric, such as non-woven polypropylene. If three-layer masks are unavailable, consider layering several single-layer masks.

The mask should fit tightly over your nose, mouth, and chin; a loose mask with gaps will be less effective. Make sure that the ear loops or head straps are secure.

Reusable fabric masks should be washed in hot soapy water and dried between each use, and when they become damp or soiled. Damaged masks will be less effective and should be discarded.

### BE AWARE:

- Counterfeit respirators that do not provide sufficient protection have been reported for sale. Ensure you only purchase from reputable vendors and manufacturers, and verify that the NIOSH approval number (for N95s) is legitimate. Visit [Government of Canada](#) – Fraudulent and unauthorized N95 respirators may not protect consumers against COVID-19 for more information.
- Some single-use non-medical masks look like respirators or medical masks; however, they will not have the appropriate regulatory test standards marked on the packaging labels.
- Masks with air release valves are not effective at protecting others and are not recommended as they allow your exhaled air and respiratory droplets to escape from the mask.
- Neck warmers, bandanas, gaiters, and buffs also do not provide sufficient protection.

Visit the links below for more detailed information about respirators, medical/surgical masks, and non-medical masks.

### PHAC:

[COVID-19 medical masks and respirators: Overview](#)

[COVID-19 medical masks and respirators: Information for health professionals](#)

[COVID-19 mask use: Advice for community settings](#)

[COVID-19 mask use: How to choose, use and care for a mask](#)

[COVID-19 mask use: How to put on, remove and clean a mask](#)

### CCOHS:

[Get the Facts on Masks](#)

[Video: How to choose a mask](#)

[Video: How to safely wear a mask](#)

[Video: How to care for a mask](#)

[Respirators, Surgical Masks, and Non-Medical Masks](#)

[Respirators - Respirators Versus Surgical Masks](#)

[Respirator Selection](#)

[Respirator Care](#)

[Respirators - Wearing a Respirator](#)

[Respiratory Protection Against Airborne Infectious Agents for Health Care Workers](#)

**If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact your local hospital, call 911 immediately, or contact a [Crisis Centre in your area](#).**



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It is important that mental health resources and support are provided to all workers, including access to an employee assistance program, if available.

For further information on COVID-19, refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

Note that this guidance is just some of the adjustments organizations can make during a pandemic. Adapt this list by adding your own good practices and policies to meet your organization's specific needs.

For further information on respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19, refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

**Disclaimer:** As public and occupational health and safety information may continue to change, local public health authorities should be consulted for specific, regional guidance. This information is not intended to replace medical advice or legislated health and safety obligations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency, and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.