

# FACE COVERINGS

## COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department (updated 5/29/20)



### **I've heard the county health officer issued a face covering directive, why did she do this?**

As our county moves into Phase 2, there will be more and more people out interacting. It is good to see people going back to work and out supporting our local businesses that are back open. We know that social distancing is one tool that works to stop the spread of disease. But sometimes, it's difficult to maintain 6 ft social distance.

This directive asks all individuals who can to wear face coverings in public indoor and outdoor settings where they cannot maintain 6ft social distancing. Wearing a face covering is [recommended by the CDC](#) because it can help prevent accidentally spreading COVID-19 while interacting with others. We, as a community, are happy to be in Phase 2 and want to keep our county moving in the right direction. We don't want to have an increase in cases, and using face coverings is one way to help achieve that.

Using a face covering is another tool to keep our community safe. It does not replace the need to stay home when we are sick, avoid non-essential contact and activities with others, washing our hands, or avoiding touching our face.

### **What authority does the health officer have to make this directive?**

Washington State law gives this authority to the health officer. RCW 70.05.070 (2)-(3) requires and empowers the local health officer to take such action as necessary to maintain health and to control and prevent the spread of any contagious or infectious diseases within the jurisdiction. Additionally, WAC 246-100-036 requires the local health officer, when necessary to institute disease control measures as he or she deems necessary based on his or her professional judgement, current standards of practice, and the best available medical and scientific information.

### **I thought we weren't going to have a face covering directive, why did the health officer change her mind?**

Although Thurston County has not experienced the large number of cases and deaths as other areas in our state, we are experiencing local community transmission of COVID-19. Since the beginning of April, the health officer has been advocating for the use of a face covering to protect others. As we move into Phase 2 as a county, it is important that we continue to do the things that can stop the spread of this disease. Since the beginning of May, fewer people out in public are wearing face coverings, or social distancing. Over the 3 day holiday weekend, 8 more COVID 19 cases were confirmed in Thurston County (most likely after Mother's Day when the

weather was good). Over the next few days, we will have more reported cases because of exposures to the current cases. These are some of the reasons. You can read more about Dr. Yu's thinking in her current [letter to the community](#) about this issue.

### **Do face coverings really work?**

Yes, face coverings do help prevent the spread of COVID 19. Because COVID-19 is a novel virus, we are learning more as we go. In the beginning, face coverings weren't recommended. But starting in April, both the CDC and the [Thurston County Health Officer began advising](#) the use of face coverings because they help prevent the accidental spread of COVID-19.

The CDC has confirmed that many people who are infected show no symptoms, so they do not know they are sick. Unfortunately, this means people can contribute to the spreading of the disease in the community. Wearing a face covering helps prevent spread from happening. They provide an extra layer of protection to stop respiratory droplets from traveling in the air and onto other people. You can learn more on the science [here](#).

### **Do I have to wear a mask? What kind of face coverings work?**

Finding the right kind of face covering is important. No one wants to be uncomfortable. Find something that works for you.

Your face covering doesn't have to be a mask. You can use fabric cloth face masks, scarves, and bandana coverings or [other material as recommended by the CDC](#). Please do not use N95 masks, these are for healthcare providers.

### **Are there any exceptions?**

Yes, there are people who are unable to wear a face covering for a variety of reasons. Please be kind to others in the community. This directive is meant to be used to educate and encourage others to wear face coverings, if they can. Exemptions include:

- Children three and younger;
- Children age 4-12 years unless parents and caregivers supervise the use of face coverings by children to avoid misuse;
- Any person who has any type of disability that prevents them from comfortably wearing or removing a face covering;
- Any person who is deaf and uses facial and mouth movements as part of communication;
- Any person who has been advised by a medical, legal, or behavioral health professional that wearing a face covering may pose a risk to themselves; and,
- Any person who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance.

### **Is there a penalty for not wearing a face covering?**

No. A violation of the directive does not create grounds for residents or law enforcement to stop, detain, issue a citation, arrest, intimidate, or harass individuals who are not in compliance. The directive should be used to educate, encourage, and persuade individuals to wear face coverings.

It is up to all of us in our community to stop the spread of COVID-19. Following this directive is another way we can do this.

### **How is this going to be enforced?**

This directive is intended to educate, encourage, and persuade individuals to wear face coverings. Law enforcement will not stop, detain, issue a citation, arrest, intimidate, or harass individuals who are not in compliance.

We are asking for voluntary compliance from the public. It's up to all of us in the community to help stop the spread of COVID-19. We protect others by wearing a mask and others protect us by wearing a mask.

### **When am I supposed to wear a face covering?**

Wear a face covering when:

- you are in indoor or outdoor public settings, and
- you are not able to keep 6ft distance from people who are not household members

For example, if you are at a crowded area like the Farmer's Market, wear your mask.

### **Do I need to wear a face covering while on a walk or in parks?**

It depends. If you are within 6 feet of people other than your family members, then you should wear a face covering. If you are out in your neighborhood walking and not within 6 feet of other people then it isn't required, but you may want to have a mask in your pocket depending on the space you are in.

### **What should I do if I see someone who isn't wearing a face covering?**

Nothing. Enforcement is not expected or appropriate for law enforcement or members of the public. Some individuals have conditions or circumstances that make wearing a mask difficult or dangerous.

### **Is my employer required to provide me with a face covering for work?**

The Governor's [Safe Start Plan](#) requires employers to provide the protective gear required for their employees to do business.

## **How can I make my own face covering?**

Our public health partners at Seattle-King County devoted an [entire blog post](#) to creative ideas for making a face covering. The [CDC offered directions](#) for making your own mask.

## **How do I care for my face covering?**

You should wash your face covering after each use. Wash it in your washing machine. You can include it with your regular laundry. Wash it on the warmest setting appropriate for the fabric.

If you are washing your mask by hand, follow [this information](#).

Make sure to completely dry your face covering before using.

Before and after you put on your cloth face covering, you should clean your hands either with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or with soap and water.

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## **Contact Information**

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department

- Phone: 360-867-2500
- WA Relay: 711 or 800-833-6338
- COVID-19 Webpage: <http://bit.ly/ThurstonCOVID-19>