



Face covering advice for community services workers

Last updated 4 August 2020

Who should read this?

This factsheet is for community services providers across Victoria.

Why has the advice changed?

Due to an increased risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), the department has updated its advice for all community services staff in Victoria, including regional and rural areas. It is a requirement for any person delivering community services that you wear a face mask while you are at work outside your home. This requirement applies to community services workers across Victoria (regional and metropolitan areas).

For more general information on face coverings, visit <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-covid-19>

For up to date information on personal protective equipment (PPE) for community services, consult the [PPE for community service providers for prevention of COVID-19](#)

Key requirements

Question	Brief answer – further information below.
When do I need to wear a face mask?	Wear a face mask while you are at work outside your home
What type of face mask should I wear?	Level 1 surgical masks
Do I still need to physically distance from other people while wearing a face mask?	Yes
Can I take off my face mask to talk to other people?	No
Does the person I am providing support to need to wear a face covering?	Service users do not need to wear a face covering when they are at home. It is preferable that service users wear a face covering when their worker is with them, but they may choose not to do this.
Do young people in residential care have to wear face coverings in the residential home?	No, but they may choose to do so.
How do I order face masks for my staff?	Complete the request for PPE form online.

Why do I need to wear a face covering?

As we are seeing a higher rate of community transmission, a face covering provides an additional physical barrier to coronavirus (COVID-19), protecting you and those around you.

It is important to continue to use other measures that will slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) such as performing hand hygiene regularly and maintaining at least 1.5 metres distance from others.

Do I need to wear a face covering or other PPE while doing my job?

Yes. People delivering services to the community have a duty to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and to not adversely affect the health and safety of others. Please continue to be vigilant with good hygiene and physical distancing. This includes:

- frequently performing hand hygiene: carrying and using alcohol-based hand sanitiser (where permitted) or if hands are visibly soiled washing with soap and water
- covering mouth when coughing or sneezing, using an inner elbow or tissue
- seeing a health care professional if you start to feel unwell
- physical distancing such as avoiding physical contact with others (including shaking hands) and maintaining at least 1.5 metres distance where possible.

Please also refer to the following information - [PPE for community service providers for prevention of COVID-19](#).

What sort of face covering should I wear?

Wear a level 1 surgical mask when providing community services.

There are several 'levels' of surgical mask – level 1 masks are required for community service workers.

There are other types of masks and respirators (such as P2 or N95). These are not recommended for use in the community and not advised to be used outside of the healthcare or specific industries under health advice.

Please note that this advice differs from that for the general community, who may wear other types of face coverings.

Do I need to change any other workplace practices?

Community service providers can continue to safely operate in areas where Stage 2 and Stage 3 restrictions are in place. Please remain vigilant, and implement the [Guidance for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) planning in the community services sector](#) for the benefit of staff, clients and community members.

Do these requirements apply to volunteers?

Yes, this requirement applies to volunteers providing community services.

Are there reasons for not wearing a face mask at work?

For the safety of service users and other staff it is essential that you wear a face mask. There are circumstances where a face mask cannot be worn, e.g. a medical condition may make wearing a face mask unsuitable or unsafe. If you cannot wear a face mask, you will need to discuss this with your manager and consider whether attending the workplace is appropriate.

In limited circumstances, the option of a face shield may be considered.

For a list of lawful excuses or exceptions for the community refer to: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-and-coverings-covid-19>

How do I wear a face mask correctly?

Putting it on:



Wash your hands
before putting on the mask



Make sure the mask:

- covers your nose and mouth
- fits snugly under your chin
- fits over the bridge of your nose
- fits against the sides of your face.



Do not touch the front of the mask while wearing it.
If you do touch the mask, wash or sanitise your hands immediately.
Do not allow the mask to hang around your neck.

Taking it off:



Wash your hands
before removing the mask



Grasp the ear loops or undo the ties.
For masks with a pair of ties, undo the bottom one first, then the top one.
If your mask has filters, remove them and throw them away. Fold the mask and put it directly into the laundry or into a disposable or washable bag for laundering.
Dispose of single-use surgical masks responsibly.



Wash or sanitise your hands
after removing the mask.
Wash cloth, face coverings each day in hot water (60°C) with soap or laundry detergent.
Do not share with other people.

For people who are using a face mask it is important to wear it properly. If you do not wear a face mask correctly, the advantages of wearing a face mask will be lost putting you or others at risk.

You should:

- wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, or use a hand sanitiser that is made up of over 60% alcohol before putting on your face mask **and** after taking it off
- check for defects in the face mask, such as tears or broken loops
- check the manufacturer's instructions about which side of the face mask should face outwards

- make sure the face mask covers your nose and mouth and fits snugly under your chin, over the bridge of your nose and against the sides of your face.

It is important to remember that you:

- do not touch the front of your mask while wearing or removing it
- do not allow the mask to hang around your neck or under your nose
- do not pull your mask up and down to talk or drink or eat
- do not wear your face mask for more than four hours, and change sooner if it becomes damp, soiled or damaged
- do not reuse single use face masks

Follow this advice when removing your face mask <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-covid-19#whats-the-best-way-to-take-off-a-face-covering>

What about face shields?

In **limited circumstances**, the option of a face shield may be considered.

If face shields are considered, reusable face shields should be cleaned and disinfected after each use. Disposable face shields should only be worn for single use. Ensure you follow the instructions as per manufacturers guidelines.

How often do I need to change my face mask?

A surgical mask may be worn for up to four hours; however, it must be changed sooner if it becomes damp, soiled or damaged.

The same face mask may be worn to attend to several service users for up to four hours, including if you are visiting more than one service user in their own home and during the period of travelling to each residence. However, the mask should be used continuously and discarded if it is removed between service users.

Surgical masks should not be reused as they are single use and should be disposed in a sealed rubbish bin.

Can I reuse my face mask?

Surgical masks are for single-use only and should be immediately disposed of responsibly. If your face mask is contaminated (for example, if someone coughs on you), you should dispose of it as clinical waste.

Can I take off my face mask if I find it uncomfortable whilst working?

It is important that you wear your face mask all the time when at work, but some people may require short breaks from wearing their face mask.

When you do so, ensure you are not near other people and follow this advice for removing your face mask <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-covid-19#whats-the-best-way-to-take-off-a-face-covering>

Do I still need to physically distance from people if I'm wearing a face mask?

Yes. A face mask can reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission but is **not** a substitute for physical distancing.

Physical distancing is important to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). Regular hand hygiene is also critical, including when putting on and taking off a face mask.

Do I need to wear a mask in the staff office even if I am alone or 1.5 metres away from others?

Yes, you have to wear a face covering unless you meet one of the reasons for exemptions such as a medical condition

However, if you are working alone in an enclosed space (like an office) you do not need to wear a face covering, but you must carry it with you, or if you are working alone outside and there is no one within 100 metres.

Can I take off my face mask to talk with other people?

No. You should keep your face mask on while speaking with other people and maintain a distance of at least 1.5 metres.

Can I take off my face mask if someone I am communicating with can't hear me?

You can remove your face mask if you are communicating with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.

You should maintain physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres and if you need to cough or sneeze, do so into a tissue or your inner elbow.

You may also consider using written communication or an AUSLAN interpreter.

Does the person I am providing support to need to wear a face covering?

Service users do not need to wear a face covering when they are at home. It is preferable that service users wear a face covering when their worker is with them, but they may choose not to do this. From 11.59 on Sunday 2 August 2020, all people must wear a face covering when they leave home, wherever they live.

Do residents of residential services need to wear face coverings?

The requirement to wear face coverings when outside your home do not apply when residents are in their residential facility. However, it does apply to the facility's staff and visitors inside the facility and when a resident leaves the facility for one of the four reasons.

Should children in my care wear a face covering?

Children who are under the age of 12 years old do not need to wear a face covering.

Children who are two years or younger must not wear face coverings as they are a choking and suffocation risk.

Advice for the general community on face coverings can be found at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-coverings-covid-19>

What do I do if a person is uncomfortable or frightened about my face mask?

Wearing a face mask helps to keep you and others safe. You should discuss the importance of wearing a face mask with those you are providing support to. You should work together on how you can provide support and still be protected from risk of coronavirus (COVID-19).

How do I get supplies of face masks for my workplace?

For those in need of face masks to continue providing vital services to the community, please complete the [request for PPE form](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/request-ppe-fact-sheet) online <<https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/request-ppe-fact-sheet>>. Demand for PPE is very high and all requests will be triaged with priority given to facilities and programs where there has been a confirmed case of COVID-19.

Will the department supply face masks for clients?

Department of Health and Human Services will be distributing 2.1 million reusable face masks to vulnerable Victorians and Aboriginal Victorians

Further information including the eligibility criteria and the process for ordering masks to distribute to clients can be found online <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/reusable-face-masks-covid-19>.

Will there be enough face masks?

The Department of Health and Human Services is constantly monitoring its access to supply of face masks and PPE and will keep the community sector workforce informed about supply moving forward.

To receive this document in another format, [email the Community Service Planning and Coordination Office](mailto:cspsc.office@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <cspsc.office@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

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Available from the [information for community services coronavirus \(COVID-19\) webpage](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-community-services-coronavirus-disease-covid-19) <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-community-services-coronavirus-disease-covid-19 >.

To find out more information about coronavirus and how to stay safe visit
[DHHS.vic – coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus)

<<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>>

If you need an interpreter, call TIS National on 131 450

For information in other languages, scan the QR code or visit
[DHHS.vic –Translated resources - coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/translated-resources-coronavirus-disease-covid-19)

<<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/translated-resources-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>>



For any questions

Coronavirus hotline 1800 675 398 (24 hours)

Please keep Triple Zero (000) for emergencies only

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Available at: [DHHS.vic – coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus) <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>>