

COVID-19 Protection against Transmission of Infectious Disease – Face Masks

There are multiple types of facemasks available, which vary in protective level; depending on the risk of exposure (i.e. frontline health care worker risks are different than general public).

Masks should be worn as per Provincial guidance/legislation, Health Unit recommendations and/or internal policy. It is important to use hand hygiene practices before putting your mask on, and when removing it, to lower risk of exposure.

High filtration P100, N95, Medical and Surgical masks, are generally used in higher risk situations such as health care and personal care provision, whereas cloth/fabric masks are effective in most situations for the protection against COVID-19 transmission.

World Health Organization (WHO) guidance on fabric masks:

- Check for filtration, breathability and fit when choosing a fabric mask. Three layers of material is preferential in order to provide filtration and protection.
- It should be held in place comfortably against the face, with small adjustments needed, using elastic bands or ties around ears/back of head.
- A mask needs to fit closely over your nose, cheeks and chin at all times.
- When the edges of the mask are not close to the face and shift, such as when speaking, air penetrates through the edges of the mask rather than being filtered through the fabric.
- Masks with vents or exhalation valves are not advised because they allow unfiltered breath to escape the mask.
- Some masks will have markings stating they meet national safety and performance guidelines for filtration.

Neck gaiters (also known as neck warmers) are NOT recommended because they:

- are likely to move or slip out of place
- aren't well secured to the head or ears, and do not seal/fit closely to nose, cheeks and chin to provide protection
- do not provide filtration (as typically made of one layer of fabric)
- are difficult to remove without contaminating yourself (pulling over head means the material comes into contact with entire face upon removal after use)

Scarves or bandanas are NOT recommended because they:

- are likely to move or slip out of place
- aren't well secured to the head or ears
- don't cover the nose, mouth and chin securely without gaps

All masks should be used once and then disposed of appropriately or cleaned with normal laundry prior to reuse. Bleaching is not necessary or recommended.