

July 17, 2020

1. Why now? With Phase 3 in place, there is higher risk of person to person contact and increased risk of exposure to COVID-19. Wearing a mask or face covering helps protect everyone. This measure will support the local economy by helping businesses to remain open. This step is also being taken ahead of a possible second wave of COVID-19, and the upcoming flu season. All of Northeastern Ontario has taken a similar approach. Current scientific evidence supports this measure and we are responding; we want to normalize the behaviour now.

2. What is considered a mask or face covering? A “mask” includes any cloth, medical or disposable mask that filters respiratory droplets and securely covers the nose, mouth and chin by being in contact with your face, without any gaps. A face covering is a piece of cloth, bandana, scarf or even clothing that loosely covers your nose, mouth and chin. Face coverings may provide some protection from COVID-19, but a fitted mask is recommended as the best option.

3. What about face shields? A face shield is not a substitute for wearing a mask because it doesn't filter respiratory droplets. Droplets can be inhaled around the shield, or you can spread them to others. If you wear a face shield, we recommend - if possible - to also wear a mask. For those that can't wear a mask, a face shield is considered a “better than nothing” option, at this time. A face shield should extend below the chin and cover the sides of the face.

4. Who should wear a mask or face covering? Everyone except: Children under the age of 2 or children under the age of five years either chronologically or developmentally who refuse to wear a mask and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver; people with medical conditions who cannot safely wear a face covering (e.g. breathing, mental health, physical or cognitive difficulties), people who are unable to apply or remove a mask without assistance, or for religious or cultural beliefs, and people who work in the public space if they not in a public area or are behind a physical barrier such as Plexiglas.

5. When and where exactly do masks or face coverings need to be worn? Whenever you are in an *indoor public space* with others. This includes all businesses, retailers, restaurants, gyms/studios, common areas of hotels/motels, libraries, laundry mats, taxis, public transit, spas and salons, places of worship, halls, theatres, and waiting rooms.

6. Are there businesses or public places who are not required to develop a policy? Yes. For example, mask direction for schools, child care centres, day camps and health care settings is provided in other Ministry Directives.

7. What about restaurants? Or the gym? It is ok to temporarily remove your mask while enjoying a meal or exercising at the gym. But please remember to stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your social circle and wash your hands often.

8. Do we need a doctor's note for an exemption? No. Wearing a mask or face covering is a requirement that is part of an “honour system”. We will continue to communicate to businesses and the public about who is exempted from wearing a mask or face covering.

9. Will proof of exemption be required, or can people be refused entry to a business or indoor public space? Businesses and administrators of indoor public spaces must have a policy for masks and face coverings and to enforce this measure in good faith. No person should be required to provide proof of exemption and no one should be turned away from a business or indoor public space if unable to wear a mask.

10. What about enforcement? Businesses and organizations are expected to implement and enforce their face covering policy in good faith. Those that do not have a policy in place may be subject to enforcement by Public Health Inspectors or other persons authorized to enforce the provisions of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act.

11. Doesn't this infringe on my rights? Public health's mandate includes protecting the health of everyone in our community and preventing illness. Wearing a mask works against spreading COVID-19. You might feel that it is unnecessary in our region. We have had low numbers and we want to keep it that way! This measure will help. We recognize that no one should be forced to wear a mask if they are not able to wear one. We encourage our community to be COVID-Kind. Masks will protect you and especially they protect people around you in case you have the virus but don't know it. Be thoughtful, respectful and considerate of one another and understand that not everyone can wear a mask safely.

12. What if I can't afford a mask? Not everyone can pick up or afford to buy masks so we would like to help. Please contact Timiskaming Connections at connect@timiskaminghu.com or call 1-866-747-4305, ext. 2278.

13. Where can I get a mask? Many local retailers sell masks and many people have been making masks at home. If you are uncertain of where to get a mask, please contact Timiskaming Connections at connect@timiskaminghu.com, call 1-866-747-4305, ext. 2278 or visit www.timiskaminghu.com. We are working on putting together a list of places across the district where people can get masks and will share the info with you!

For more information please contact Timiskaming Health Unit's COVID Line 1-866-747-4305, Ext. 7 or visit www.timiskaminghu.com