

## Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

# Masks for Source Control in Non-Healthcare Workers

**Masks (surgical/procedure masks or non-medical masks such as cloth masks or face coverings), can be worn to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to others (known as source control). Assess worker's risk of COVID-19 exposure, and particularly their inability to physically distance, when considering source control masking.**

### Masks used for source control – principles

- Masks worn for source control protect others from potential infectious droplets of the wearer.
- Wash hands or clean with alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently and immediately after touching the mask.
- Some workers may not wish to wear a mask or have conditions (e.g. asthma, eczema) that make masking difficult or uncomfortable. Be flexible in a workplace policy on masks for source control.
- If personal protective equipment (PPE) is required to perform a work task, that requirement takes priority over masking for source control.
- Ensure masks do not introduce a new work hazard e.g. entanglement in machinery, impairing vision, causing overheating, interfering with communication.

### Assessing worker risk of exposure to COVID-19

- A risk assessment can help the employer determine whether source control could be helpful for workers. The [US Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) risk categorization is adapted below.
- Risk among workers will vary by ability to physically distance and other controls available, e.g. physical barriers, working outdoors.
- Non-healthcare workers generally fall into:
  - Low exposure risk – minimal contact with the public and coworkers
  - Medium exposure risk – frequent/close contact with the public and coworkers
- In some of these situations, PPE may be worn. If not, masking could be considered for source control where workers are not able to maintain physical distance (indoor or outdoor), or in confined indoor spaces with others.

## Applying the hierarchy of controls

- A comprehensive strategy to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace would include as many controls as possible:
  - **Engineering:** Remove/block the hazard at the source (e.g. physical distancing, physical barriers such as plexiglass booths, frequent environmental cleaning/disinfection).
  - **Administrative:** Optimizing the movement of workers to minimize potential contact with the hazard (e.g. staggered shifts, breaks, and meals; work station spacing; work from home policies, limited hours, virtual meetings, paid sick leave, screening/reporting).
  - **Personal Hygiene:** Worker actions or behaviors to reduce hazard exposure (e.g. clean hands, coughing or sneezing into the sleeve, masking for source control).
  - **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** e.g. surgical/procedure masks, gloves, eye protection, gowns or coveralls.
- Masking for source control could be considered a personal hygiene measure, and it protects others, not the masked worker. If implementing masking for source control:
  - Masks are to be changed if visibly soiled, damp, damaged or difficult to breathe through.
  - Breathability, comfort, and safety are critical.
  - The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) and the US [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) have provided guidance on how to make, use, and care for cloth masks.
  - Refer to [When and How to Wear a Mask](#) and the [Ministry of Health](#) for more information.
- When using masks for source control, always remember:
  - Masking for source control protects others around you by catching your droplets. Ensure the mask covers both the nose and mouth snugly.
  - Worker risk of COVID-19 exposure can help determine if a source control masking policy could be useful as one measure in a broad strategy to reduce the risk of COVID-19.
  - When wearing masks, it is critical to avoid touching the face, and to wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer often.

## Learn about the virus

To learn more and access up-to-date information on COVID-19, visit the Ontario Ministry of Health's website at [ontario.ca/coronavirus](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus).

For more information please contact: \_\_\_\_\_

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