



Seattle Department of Human Resources

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COVID-19 Face Covering Policy for City of Seattle Employees, Contractors, and Vendors and Visitors to City Facilities

Updated November 30, 2020

Effective Date: May 18, 2020 until termination of the Mayoral Proclamation of Civil Emergency.

Background

Face coverings are required statewide in all public spaces because they are effective in slowing the spread of COVID-19, especially when combined with 6 feet of physical distance. Any of us can carry the virus and not realize we're spreading it when we talk, cough or sneeze. To slow the spread, there are three [State of Washington face cover orders](#) in place:

1. **For employers and workers:** Washington employers must ensure workers wear face coverings at work in almost all situations. Employers must provide face coverings if workers do not have them. Employers must comply with this order, which is enforced by the Department of Labor & Industries.
2. **For the public:** An order from the secretary of health requires Washingtonians to wear face coverings in public spaces and shared spaces, both indoors and outdoors. Examples include hotel or apartment hallways, outdoors where many people are gathered such as parks, playgrounds or popular walking paths, and in a restaurant when not seated and eating. People are individually responsible to comply with this order.
3. **For businesses:** A proclamation from Gov. Inslee prohibits businesses from allowing customers to enter without face coverings. Businesses are encouraged to provide alternatives for customers who cannot wear masks.

In accordance with the [statewide guidance](#) and the [Department of Health \(DOH\) Directive](#), **all City employees, contractors, and vendors**, unless exempted below, are required to wear a cloth face covering over their noses and mouths. This requirement applies when conducting work at all City indoor and outdoor facilities and when performing City work off-site.

Visitors and members of the public, unless exempted below, are required to wear a cloth face covering over their noses and mouths when entering a City facility and/or when interacting with City employees. Visitors are encouraged to wear their own cloth face covering but will be provided a disposable face covering if needed.

This policy is intended to protect our City workforce and the public we serve and remains in effect through the termination of the Mayoral Proclamation of Civil Emergency. It may be revised to reflect

changes in federal, state, or local face covering guidance.

In addition to wearing cloth face coverings, City employees must continue to follow public health safety precautions such as washing your hands, maintaining six feet of physical distancing, and staying home when ill, after having close contact with an infected person, or when advised by a public health official or health care provider to quarantine or isolate.

Exemptions

Specific working conditions – A cloth face covering is not required when a City employee, contractor, or vendor is:

- Working alone – Per the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, someone is considered to be working alone when they're isolated from interaction with other people and have little or no expectation of in-person interruption. Examples of working alone include:
 - A lone worker inside the enclosed cab of a crane or other heavy equipment, vehicle, or harvester.
 - A worker by themselves outside in an agricultural field, the woods, or other open area with no anticipated contact with others.
 - In a City building, the City defines “working alone” as when an employee is in a closer door office space. If the employee is not in a closed door office space, they must wear a mask.
- Conducting tasks where federal, state, or local standards (DOSH, WISHA, OSHA, RCW, WAC, etc.) require the wearing of a specific mask, face shield, or respirator that cannot be performed while wearing a cloth face covering. Employees with more comprehensive Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidelines, such as first responders or line workers, will continue to follow those specific guidelines.
- Operational needs dictate otherwise, including when wearing a face covering would be impractical or unsafe. City departments have discretion to determine protocols necessary to comply with this policy while providing services to the public

Medical or health risk – A cloth face covering is not required if:

- A medical professional has advised that wearing a face covering may pose a health risk to the person wearing the covering or impair their breathing;
- Wearing a face covering would create a safety risk to the person as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines;
- The person is physically unable to put on or remove the face covering without assistance;
- The person is deaf or hard of hearing and uses facial and mouth movements as part of communication; or
- Children younger than two years old should not wear face coverings. Children ages 2 to 4 should wear face coverings with adult supervision, and children five and older are required to wear face coverings.

Additional accommodations will be determined on a case-by-case basis with department human resources representatives. Employees may be required to provide documentation to substantiate their need for an exception or accommodation.

Provisioning of Face Coverings

- **Face Covering Provisioning – Employees:** The City of Seattle will provide three (3) washable cloth face coverings to all employees. Departments will notify employees about how these face coverings will be distributed.
- **Disposable Face Covering Provisioning – Visitors:** The City of Seattle will provide a disposable face covering to any visitor entering a City facility who does not have a face covering. In accordance with the public health Directive, visitors are encouraged to wear their own cloth face coverings.

Equity Considerations

The City of Seattle is committed to maintaining a respectful, productive, inclusive, and equitable workplace, and discrimination and other conduct that is inconsistent with our values will not be tolerated. If an employee believes they may be experiencing discrimination or harassment around the use of face coverings, they should immediately speak to their supervisor, HR Manager, or contact the Office of the Employee Ombud. Employees, RSJ Change Teams, and department leadership are encouraged to proactively discuss and address potential equity challenges that may arise from this policy to require the use of cloth face coverings and related COVID-19 public health directives.

City of Seattle COVID-19 Face Covering Policy Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The City of Seattle's face covering policy follows State and County public health guidance. For more information on these public health directives, visit kingcounty.gov/masks and <https://coronavirus.wa.gov/information-for/you-and-your-family/face-masks-or-cloth-face-covering>.

1. Why is the City requiring the use of face coverings for employees and visitors to our facilities?

The City of Seattle is requiring the use of cloth face coverings to protect our employees and those in the community with whom we interact. The CDC advises the use of face coverings to slow the spread of the virus by helping to prevent the transmission from people who may have the virus but are asymptomatic. This policy is in alignment with CDC, [State of Washington Department of Health](#), and [Public Health – Seattle & King County](#) policies. More information about how COVID-19 spreads can be found on the [CDC website](#).

Note: Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing, hand washing, or staying home when you are ill, after having close contact with an infected person, or when advised by a public health official or health care provider to quarantine or isolate due to a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 diagnosis.

2. Will employees and visitors be provided face coverings?

Yes. All City employees will receive three (3) washable cloth face coverings (sample image below). Contractors, vendors, and visitors entering City facilities will be provided disposable face coverings if they do not have their own cloth face covering.



3. What is the difference between a face covering and other kinds of protective masks?

- **Face covering:** A self-made/procured or City-provisioned mask that covers the nose, mouth, and chin, not intended for medical situations. Some face coverings may have an additional pocket for a filter insert. (Note: City-provisioned face coverings meet the City's definition of an adequate face covering with or without the filter insert.) All face coverings should comply with the City's professional workplace standards and follow [Washington State Department of Health](#) and [CDC's guidelines](#).
- **Disposable face covering:** A single-use mask that is meant to provide the same level of protection as a washable face covering and is not to be used in medical situations.
- **Procedure, surgical, or hospital mask:** A mask meant to be used by medical professionals or first responders. These may also be used by patients during patient care and are not intended for use as a general-purpose face covering.
- **Filtering Facepiece respirators (ex N95):** A National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) approved respirator that meets stricter standards for filtering airborne particles. These are intended to protect the wearer and should be reserved for medical professionals and first responders.

4. How do I wear a face covering?

Guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) states that face coverings should:

- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face, covering your mouth, nose, and chin
- Be secured with ties or ear loops
- Include multiple layers of fabric
- Allow for breathing without restriction
- Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

When putting on a face covering you should wash your hands before and after touching the face covering.

5. When must I wear my face covering?

All City of Seattle employees, contractors, and vendors are expected to wear face coverings, except when working alone; for example, in a closed door office space or vehicle, at a job site, or when the job has no in-person interaction.

Employees with more comprehensive PPE guidelines (first responders, line workers, etc.) will continue to follow those specific guidelines.

6. Do I need to wear a face covering when I'm working alone in my cubicle?

Yes. An employee must wear a face covering when working alone in a cubicle. If the employee is working in a closed door office space, a face covering is not required.

7. What should I do if I am unable to wear a face covering?

Contact your HR representative to discuss your need for an exception to the policy or a reasonable accommodation.

8. When am I not required to wear my cloth face covering?

Employees are not required to wear a cloth face covering when:

- Eating or drinking but maintain social distance.
- Working alone at a job site, in a vehicle, open area/outside, closed door office space, or when the job has no in-person interaction.
- Teleworking (i.e., not reporting to a City facility or conducting City work in a public space).
- Exemptions for specific working conditions or medical or health risk are applicable, as outlined in the City's policy.

9. What if I refuse to wear a cloth face covering?

The City's cloth face covering policy is intended to help protect City employees and the people whom we serve by reducing the risk of transmission through respiratory droplets by individuals who may be asymptomatic, but still contagious. Beginning May 18, 2020, wearing of cloth face coverings is mandatory for all City employees, unless exempted from this policy. Employees who do not comply with this policy may be sent home on their own applicable leave and not allowed to return to work until another option is determined to reasonably accommodate the employee. Refusal to wear a face covering will be considered a violation of City policy and health and safety requirements.

10. I have recovered from COVID-19 and/or I have COVID-19 antibodies. Do I still need to wear a face covering?

Yes.

11. Do employees still need to maintain physical distancing measures if wearing a face covering?

Yes. Wearing face coverings is an additional public health measure people should take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The CDC still recommends that you stay at least six feet away from other people (physical distancing), frequently wash your hands, and take other everyday preventive actions.

12. What can I do if a co-worker works within six feet of me and is not wearing their facecovering?

Employees should consult with their supervisor if the situation does not allow the employee to maintain approximately six feet of physical distance from co-workers in a confined workplace. Employees should not confront another employee about compliance with this policy, instead consult with your supervisor or department HR representative

13. How will the City educate visitors about our face covering requirement?

The City of Seattle, King County, and Public Health – Seattle & King County are working on an expansive strategy to ensure that all residents know about the Countywide face covering health directive. That includes using the media, social media, stakeholder letters, and direct outreach to ensure folks know what the order means for them.

In addition, the City will place signs in visible locations at all facility entrances and at office reception desks to ensure visitors understand and adhere to the countywide face covering order.

14. What do I do if a visitor or member of the public refuses to wear a face covering after I have offered them one?

All visitors who do not have a face covering when entering City facilities will be provided a disposable face covering consistent with the Local Health Directive requiring face coverings in indoor and outdoor public settings. Employees should politely ask the visitor to use a face covering and remind them that they are required while in City facilities, unless the visitor states they are exempted. If the visitor does not have an exemption and and still refuses to wear a face covering, then employees may take the following progressive steps:

- Physically distance approximately six feet and provide the service to the visitor.
- If the requested service cannot be provided while physical distancing, then offer the visitor information about how to access the service remotely by phone and/or online.
- If services cannot be provided remotely, then ask the visitor to leave the building unless the visitor agrees to wear a face covering consistent with City policy and the Local Health Directive.
- After all reasonable efforts to accommodate the visitor to provide the service have been made, employees may politely ask the visitor to leave. Employees should contact their supervisor or manager if the visitor does not leave.

Note: The intent of this policy is to strongly urge compliance by visitors and members of the public to wear face coverings when accessing City services and facilities. Employees should not enforce this policy or confront visitors beyond any polite verbal requests for voluntary compliance.

15. Will I be reprimanded if I leave my work area because someone nearby is not adhering to this policy?

No, so long as you follow any established procedures for securing your work area before leaving it. Please inform your supervisor if you encounter this situation.

16. How will employees receive their City-issued cloth face coverings?

Departments will distribute face coverings to employees in coordination with Finance and Administrative Services. Your department leadership or human resources will inform you of how you will receive your face covering.

17. Am I required to use my City-issued cloth face covering with its filter?

No. City-issued face coverings meet the City’s definition of an adequate face covering with or without the filter insert.

18. Can I make and use my own cloth face covering?

Yes, employees may make and wear their own face coverings. Please visit the CDC’s website for additional information and a “how to” [video](#) to make face coverings from readily available materials. Self-made coverings should comply with professional workplace standards and follow the CDC's guidelines.

19. Do I need to wash my cloth face covering?

Yes. Both city-issued and personal cloth face coverings must be washed.

Both City-issued and personal worn face coverings may be contaminated with infectious agents. You should wash your face covering after each use in a washing machine. If you do not have access to a washing machine, you can clean your cloth face covering by vigorously lathering it in soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds. 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. Discard face coverings that:

- No longer cover the nose and mouth
- Have stretched out or damaged ties or straps
- Cannot stay on your face
- Have holes or tears in the fabric

Masks required by DOSH, WISHA and/or OHSA standards should be cleaned per manufacturer or regulatory guidance.

20. How do I handle the cloth face covering when I’m ready to eat or drink during a break?

- Wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Prepare a clean surface (*e.g.* paper towel)
- Remove the face covering by holding the strings or elastic, do not touch the front of the mask, your eyes, nose, or mouth

- Store the face covering carefully on the clean surface to avoid contamination
- Wash your hands again with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub

21. How do I store my cloth face covering when it is not in use?

Keep your cleaned cloth face covering in a sterile space to prevent contamination, for example, in a clean plastic bag.

22. What should I do if I develop a skin or breathing reaction?

Remove your face covering and inform your supervisor or human resources. If appropriate, they will attempt to find an alternative face covering made with different components.

23. Where can I find additional information regarding face coverings?

For more detailed information on this topic, please refer to:

- [King County.gov/masks](https://www.kingcounty.gov/masks)
- CDC Resources
 - [Guidance on Face Coverings](#)
 - [Cloth Face Coverings: Questions and Answers](#)
 - [How to Safely Wear and Take Off A Face Covering](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health](#)
- [Washington State Department of Labor & Industries](#)
- [King County Information on Face Coverings for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Blind Community Members](#)
- You can also receive additional information regarding the current COVID-19 situation in Washington here or by calling 1-800-525-0127. For interpretative services, press # when they answer and say your language. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 7-1-1 (Washington Relay) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov. For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.