COVID-19 Protective Face Mask/Coverings
Frequently Asked Questions

All Virginians must wear a protective face covering when outside of their home. It is essential that people continue to practice physical distancing and good hand hygiene even when wearing a face covering, including keeping six feet of distance between themselves and others whenever possible. A protective face mask/covering is one more precaution we can take to help stop the spread of COVID-19, especially by people who have COVID-19 but do not have symptoms.

The Virginia Department of Health expects the public to voluntarily comply with the provisions of the order.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a protective face mask/covering? A protective face mask/covering is any well-secured paper or cloth (like a bandana or scarf) that covers your nose and mouth. A face covering with an exhalation valve should not be used as it allows unfiltered exhaled air to escape to others.

Who must wear a protective face mask/covering? A Virginia mandate requires everyone to wear a face covering when outside their home. Protective face mask/coverings are required:

- Inside all brick and mortar retail establishments. Both essential and non-essential stores, including grocery stores and pharmacies
- Inside all personal care and grooming establishments
- Any indoor space shared by groups of people who may congregate within 6 feet of one another or who are in close proximity to each other for more than 10 minutes
- Inside food & beverage establishments, except when eating
- On public transportation
- State and local government buildings and areas where the public accesses services
- Entertainment or public amusement establishments, when permitted to open

What are the exceptions to the Virginia requirement for protective face mask/coverings? There are a few exceptions to the requirement which include:

- Children younger than 2 years old
- While eating or drinking
- While exercising
- If you have trouble breathing or are unable to remove the mask without help
- If your health conditions prohibit wearing a protective face mask/covering
- If you’re communicating with a hearing-impaired person, needing your mouth to be visible

Why is the City of Richmond giving away free protective face mask/coverings? Because we care about your health and the health of others around you. Wearing a mask helps protect
everyone in the community. We want to ensure that everyone has access to this simple, yet effective approach to help stop the spread of the virus. We know not everyone can afford or sometimes even find a protective face mask/covering to use. If everyone is wearing a mask, we all protect each other. It’s the right thing to do.

If I am sick and at home do I need to wear a protective face mask/covering? People who are sick should wear a protective face mask/covering while at home if they cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others, and at all times whenever they leave home.

Do children need to wear a protective face mask/covering? Children over the age of 2 must wear a face covering. Small children are more likely to touch their face covering, so caretakers should wash children’s hands or apply hand sanitizer often.

I have a health problem that makes it hard for me to wear a protective face mask/covering. Do I still need to wear one? If you have a health issue that makes you unable to tolerate a face covering, you do not need to wear one. This makes practicing physical distancing and hand hygiene even more essential.

Do I need to wear a protective face mask/covering when I am exercising? No, as long as you maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others.

When do workers need to wear a protective face mask/covering? Workers must wear a protective face mask/covering at work if they cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others. Employers must provide protective face mask/coverings to employees for free. Your employer may have additional requirements as to when a face covering, or other protection, is needed.

I had COVID-19 and am better now. Do I still need to wear a protective face mask/covering? Yes. The Virginia requirement to wear one applies even if you had COVID-19.

What type of protective face mask/covering is better — paper or cloth? Either a paper or cloth face covering is fine, as long as it covers your nose and mouth. Do not use a face covering with an exhalation valve. Please do not use health care worker masks, such as N95 or surgical masks. It is essential that we save health care worker masks for our health care workers.

How often do I need to wash my protective face mask/covering? If you are using a cloth face covering, we recommend washing once a day by hand or machine using detergent. The face covering should be fully dry before using. People should have a few face coverings so they can rotate for washing.

For how long can I use a paper face covering? You can continue to use a paper face covering until it becomes damaged, dirty or wet.

Are there precautions I should take with my face covering? Using face coverings incorrectly can spread germs. For this reason, it is important to properly wear, store and dispose of face coverings by doing the following:

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, every time you put on and take off your face covering. If you are unable to clean your hands, be very careful not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
• Do not put face coverings where others can touch them or where germs trapped in your face covering can touch other surfaces, such as counter tops or your kitchen table.
• Do not throw your face covering loose in a bag or backpack. Keep a paper bag with you to store your face covering if you will be taking it off when outside of your home.
• Properly dispose of used paper face coverings in the garbage. Do not throw single-use face coverings or disposable gloves on the street or down the toilet.

Is it possible to make my own face covering? Yes! A face covering can be a scarf, bandana or other cloth.