

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Masks and Face Coverings

1. What is a mask?

There are different types of masks available on the market for public use. In November 2021, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) [noted](#) that, “Different types of masks are available for public use. Non-medical masks, medical masks and respirators can all be used in the community.” Further, the PHAC states that a respirator worn in the community doesn’t need to be formally ‘fit tested’ as would be required in occupational settings.

2. What is a face covering?

Face coverings are reusable or disposable cloth masks that can either be purchased or self-made. They are not classified as personal protective equipment (PPE) and, unlike surgical or medical-procedural masks, face coverings do not meet certification standards.

The Public Health Agency of Canada advises the following (emphasis added):

“The effectiveness of non-medical masks in preventing the spread of COVID-19 can vary based on many factors. It depends on material, construction, fit and proper use. Some non-medical masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 similarly to medical masks if they:

- fit well
- have multiple layers, including at least 2 layers of breathable tightly woven fabric, such as cotton **and**
- have an effective middle filter layer.

In general, while non-medical masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19, **medical masks and respirators provide better protection**. No matter which type of mask you choose, proper fit is a key factor in its effectiveness.”

Note: If a respirator (e.g., N95) is required and used against a specific job hazard, they are considered to be Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), and as such fit testing and other Respirator Program requirements should be followed. More information on PPE and proper application on campus can be found on York’s [Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). For more information and related questions, please contact: hsewb@yorku.ca.

3. When should I wear a mask or face covering?

Anyone who is entering an indoor space on York University property, including all campuses, work sites and satellite offices, **must wear a mask or face covering that covers their mouth, nose, and chin completely. Masks are required in all indoor spaces regardless of current physical distancing guidelines.**

Please wear your mask or face covering when entering a building and for the entire duration of your stay unless an exemption applies. Indoor university spaces include lobbies, elevators, hallways and corridors, stairwells, washrooms, service desks, cafeterias and lunchrooms, common areas in residences, study lounges, meeting rooms, classrooms, research and teaching labs, shared or open-space offices, and other locations used in common, particularly where practicing physical distancing may be difficult or unpredictable.

4. Who is exempt from wearing a mask or face covering at the University?

York University observes all requirements under O. Reg [364/20](#) and relevant Toronto Public Health By-Laws ([541-2020](#) and [664-2020](#)). This includes those that pertain to exemptions from the requirement to wear a mask or face covering by:

- Children who are under two years of age;
- Persons with an underlying medical condition that inhibits their ability to wear a mask or face covering;
- Persons who are unable to place or remove a mask or face covering without assistance; Persons who are being accommodated under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, who require accommodation in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code that precludes the wearing of a mask or face covering;

York University departments and faculties may have specific practices which fall under provincial guidelines and/or operational requirements. For any questions, please contact hsewb@yorku.ca.

5. Do I need to wear a mask or face covering as an instructor while I am teaching?

Yes, masks or face coverings must be worn in all indoor spaces and for the duration of your stay. However, in very rare and exceptional circumstances, if wearing a mask or face covering materially impairs the effectiveness of a teaching activity, the mask or face covering can be temporarily removed when a minimum of 2-metre physical distancing is maintained. **Note:** All attempts must be made to wear a mask or face covering in all indoor settings.

6. If I am in a private office or other secured and enclosed space by myself, do I need to wear a mask or face covering?

Masks or face coverings must be worn in all indoor spaces and for the duration of your stay. However, when individuals are **alone** in a secured and enclosed space such as a private office, the mask or face covering can be temporarily removed while the door is closed (such as to eat lunch). If the door is open, the mask or face covering must be donned. The mask or face covering must be donned if and as soon as another individual enters another person's private space.

7. Do I need to wear a mask or face covering in cubicle areas and shared workspaces?

Masks or face coverings must be worn while indoors and for the duration of your stay. However, they can be temporarily removed for urgent health purposes provided that a minimum of 2-metre physical distance from others is maintained. York encourages all community members to consume food and beverages in designated eating areas determined by each area on campus and signage should indicate the public health measures that are in place for eating spaces.

8. Do I need to wear a mask or face covering in meeting rooms?

York is requiring all individuals to wear a mask or face covering in all indoor settings, including meeting spaces. If a mask must be temporarily removed during a meeting, please ensure 2-metre physical distancing from others is maintained and please put the mask back on as soon as possible. Alternatively, please exit the meeting space to temporarily remove your mask, and then put your mask back on before re-entering the meeting space. For further information, please see the Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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*For workspaces (other than instructional spaces), if you are interacting with a coworker or colleague who is not wearing a mask, maintain 2-metre physical distancing, ensure your mask is on correctly, and wear eye protection. This does not apply to a transient interaction.

Note: As per the Fall 2021 instructions of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2-metre physical distancing is the general requirement for all indoor workspaces at post-secondary institutions. This does not include instructional spaces.

9. As a student, do I need to wear a mask or face covering in an instructional space (ie. a classroom)?

Yes, students are required to wear a mask or face covering in all indoor spaces including classrooms, unless an exemption applies. Please see the FAQ, “Who is exempt from wearing a mask or face covering at the University.” As of Winter 2022, eating and drinking is not permitted in instructional spaces unless required for urgent health purposes. Be respectful of those with approved exemptions.

10. Can a mask or face covering be temporarily removed?

Masks or face coverings may be temporarily removed while indoors, under the following circumstances and only when public health guidance permits:

- To receive services that require the removal of a mask or face covering;
- To engage in an athletic or fitness activity;
- When performing or rehearsing in a film or television production or in a concert, artistic event, theatrical performance or other performance as approved by the University;
- While actively consuming food or drink in **designated areas for meals as determined by the area** or as needed to take medication. ***Please take extra care to maintain physical distancing during such activities;**
- When individuals are **alone** in a secured and enclosed space such as a private office, the mask or face covering can be temporarily removed while the door is closed (such as to eat lunch). If the door is open, or someone enters the room, the mask or face covering must be donned.
- Eating and drinking in instructional spaces are not permitted unless under exceptional circumstances, for example: to take a sip of water or to ingest a small amount of food for urgent health purposes (ie. Low blood sugar or to take medication)
- As may be necessary for the purposes of health and safety.

11. What if I cannot wear a mask or face covering?

York University requires all faculty, instructors, students, and staff to wear masks on our campuses. If you are not aware of this requirement, please review it here: [Mask/face covering protocol](#).

As per [O. Reg. 364/20](#), individuals are not required to provide proof of any of the exemptions as identified in the FAQ, “Who is exempt from wearing a mask or face covering at the University?”

However, If you have a medical condition, disability or impairment that affects your ability to wear a mask or face covering and you need accommodation, and you are:

- **Staff and faculty:** please contact Health, Safety and Employee Well Being at their confidential email address: ewb@yorku.ca and notify your manager or associate dean. ***Please note, you are not required to disclose your specific medical condition to your supervisor or manager.**
- **Students:** please contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) via email at sasreg@yorku.ca for accommodation needs, including those related to masks and/or face coverings
 - When an accommodation has been approved, the SAS and Faculty Office will work closely together to consult on an implementation plan and ensure relevant faculty and instructors are notified of this plan
 - Alternate options such as face shields, mask breaks and physical distancing may be incorporated as part of the implementation plan

York continues to follow all the latest public health guidance from the Ontario Government, the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Toronto Public Health on University campuses. Accommodation measures that are approved for employees or students that include a mask exemption will address undue hardship and community safety needs simultaneously. Please maintain physical distancing as your way of promoting public health and help anyone who may not be wearing a mask.

12. Do I need to wear a mask or face covering when outdoors?

When we wear a well-fitted mask, whether indoors or outdoors, we protect ourselves and others. York requires community members to wear a mask or face covering in outdoor settings when:

- Lining up and congregating and when it is not possible to maintain 2-metre physical distance from others.
- In outdoor spaces that are designated as learning spaces, regardless of distancing requirements.

13. What are the qualities of a good mask or face covering?

The Public Health Agency of Canada ([PHAC](#))’s most recent advice on masks emphasizes the importance of fit for all types of masks. PHAC notes that: “Different types of masks are available for public use. Non-medical masks, medical masks and respirators can all be used in the community.”

Further, PHAC states that, “in general, while non-medical masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19, medical masks and respirators provide better protection. No matter which type of mask you choose, proper fit is a key factor in its effectiveness.” The following information are drawn from the PHAC:

“A good quality non-medical mask or face covering will:

- fit well
- have multiple layers, including at least 2 layers of breathable tightly woven fabric, such as cotton **and**
- an effective middle filter layer

No matter what type of mask you choose to wear, remember that fit is important for all types of masks.

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- masks with a flexible nose piece may provide a better fit over the nose
- the fit of the mask can vary depending on the size and features of your face
- masks with ties or bands that go around the back of the head may provide a better fit
 - if choosing an ear loop-style mask, use one with adjustable ear loops or use the tips below to improve fit

Respirators are designed to fit snugly on the face, which may allow for a better fit than a medical mask or non-medical mask

A well-fitting mask should:

- be large enough to cover the nose, mouth and chin completely and comfortably without gaps and not allow air to escape from edges
- fit securely to the head with ties, bands or ear loops
- be comfortable and not require frequent adjustments
- maintain its shape after washing and drying (for non-medical masks only)

Ways to improve fit include:

- adjusting ties or ear loops
- adjusting the flexible nosepiece
- tying knots in the ear loops and tucking the sides of the mask so that it lies flat
- using a mask fitter or brace
 - a mask fitter or brace is a device made of flexible material worn over a mask to help provide a snug fit
 - fitters and braces may be made of plastic or silicone
- layering a well-fitting non-medical cloth mask over the top of a disposable mask to improve the fit
 - this will help to push the edges of the disposable mask closer to your face
 - make sure that you can still breathe easily when wearing 2 masks
- keeping facial hair and beards shaved or short, if possible, so the mask can fit more closely to your face.”

Learn more about: [COVID-19 mask use: How to make your mask fit properly \(printable poster\)](#)

14. Does York University provide face coverings/masks to those coming to campus?

No, all community members are required to bring their own good quality mask or face covering to campus. However, if you are on campus and you realize that you have forgotten, lost, soiled or damaged your mask, you can obtain 3-ply disposable medical/procedural masks in bundles of three from vending machines on both campuses. For the vending machine closest to you, please [see this map](#).

Machines are equipped with YU-card readers and the masks are dispensed at a nominal cost to valid YU-card holders. Proceeds will go towards a disposable mask recycling program and information about how to add funds to your YU-card account is available on the [YU-card website](#).

If a respirator (e.g., N95) is required and used against a specific job hazard, they are considered to be Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). If a mask (e.g. N95) is required as PPE (see #11 above), York University provides such masks/respirators to the employee as part of their job requirement.

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15. Is it recommended to wear a face covering or a respirator with exhalation valves or exhaust valves?

Toronto Public Health does **not** recommend [masks with exhalation valves](#) because they can spread respiratory particles within a space. As such, they do **not** protect others or limit the spread of COVID-19.

16. Is the use of clear plastic face coverings recommended?

Toronto Public Health advises that [“plastic masks](#) do not protect others from your respiratory particles because they do not fit snug to the face.” However, as per the Government of Canada, some non-medical masks that have transparent windows can be used in certain situations, including: if you are hard of hearing, you interact with someone who lip reads and/or in settings where facial expression is an important part of communication.

17. How should I wear, remove and care for a mask or face covering?

Please refer to York University’s [Mask or Face Covering Information Sheet](#) for more guidance on this topic.

18. Why wear a mask or face covering?

Wearing a mask or face covering helps to prevent your own aerosols and respiratory droplets from reaching others or from landing on surfaces. In the context of public health, masks reduce the chance of others coming into contact with any contaminant that is exhaled and made airborne. When you wear a mask or face covering, you also signal to others that you are doing your part to protect them from COVID-19.

19. Can I wear a face shield instead of a mask or face covering?

A face shield is not an alternative to a mask or face covering, according to [the PHAC](#). Face shields and goggles are primarily used to protect the eyes of the person wearing it. Goggles do not cover the nose and mouth. Face shields are not as effective at protecting you or the people around you from respiratory droplets.

If eye protection is part of the task’s PPE requirements, they are provided by the area manager or employer. Please refer to the [Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

For more details about appropriate eye protection, please see [CDC's Guidance for Wearing Masks](#)

If you have a medical condition, disability or impairment that affects your ability to wear a mask or face covering and you need accommodation, and you are:

- **Staff and faculty:** please contact Health, Safety and Employee Well Being at their confidential email address: ewb@yorku.ca and notify your manager or associate dean. ***Please note, you are not required to disclose your specific medical condition to your supervisor or manager.**
- Students: please contact Student Accessibility Services at sasreg@yorku.ca.

20. What should I do if one of my colleagues, my students or my classmates is not wearing their mask or face covering?

It's important to be aware that community members may require accommodation for medical conditions, disabilities or other exemptions that preclude them from wearing a mask or face covering. We ask that community members exercise discretion and patience should they see a fellow community member not wearing their mask or face covering.

In this case, **maintain physical distancing and wear your mask or face covering** to promote and protect public health and help anyone who is not wearing their mask. If you are in a classroom and you cannot maintain physical distance from others but you need to temporarily remove your mask, please go to an area outside of the classroom where you can maintain distance from others before temporarily removing your mask or face covering.

Please also see the "tips for challenging health and safety conversations" on the [community of care page](#) for guidance and support on this topic and more. You can also reach out to your associate dean, supervisor or manager for help with addressing or directing your concerns. Associate deans, supervisors or managers may always reach out to their area's Health and Safety Officer and/or Health and Safety Advisors from Health, Safety and Well-Being if they need support and students can reach out to: OSCR@yorku.ca.

If conflict arises, it should be resolved as close to the source as possible, in a prompt and informal manner, which respects the rights and privacy of all community members. Should such attempts at resolution be unsuccessful and conflicts continue to persist, the parties should seek the advice and/or support of the contact person in their Department or Faculty who is responsible for responding to questions and concerns related to return-to campus issues.

York Security Services should only be contacted in situations where there is an immediate threat to personal safety that cannot be resolved through other methods. Please see the [Pathways to address conflicts or concerns](#) document for further information.

21. How do I protect myself if my colleague or classmate is not wearing a mask or face covering?

Always follow the following health and safety measures:

- Maintain physical distancing, where possible.
- Wear your own well fitted mask or face covering.
- Follow other public health measures, such as practicing respiratory etiquette and washing your hands frequently.
- Toronto Public Health recommends considering wearing medical-grade masks and eye protection for classrooms or lab-settings where physical distancing or separation via a physical barrier is not possible, to allow for two-way protection for faculty, staff or students.
- See question 19 above for additional information about eye protection.

If you are an employee (e.g., staff, faculty, instructor) and you have COVID-19 related questions and concerns, please reach out to your Associate Dean, Supervisor or Manager to help address or direct your concerns. Students may reach out to: sasreg@yorku.ca

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General questions can also be directed to Health, Safety and Employee Well-Being at: hsewb@yorku.ca

References:

- [COVID-19 Guidance on Masks and Face Covering Bylaw](#)
- [Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [COVID-19 mask use: Advice for community settings](#)
- [Use of Cloth Masks or Face Coverings](#)
- [CDC's Guidance for Wearing Masks](#)