

# **Masks: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

May 2022

## 1. What is a mask?

There are different types of masks available on the market for public use. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) [notes](#) that: “Different types of masks are available for public use. Non-medical masks, medical masks and respirators (e.g. N95) can all be used in the community.” Further, the PHAC states that “respirators and medical masks provide better protection” than non-medical masks. They also state that respirators worn in the community do not need to be formally ‘fit tested’ as would be required in occupational settings.

## 2. What is a non-medical cloth mask?

Cloth masks are reusable or disposable 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, do not meet certification standards.

The PHAC advises the following (emphasis added): “Some non-medical masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 similarly to medical masks if they:

- fit well and are properly used
- 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.**”

PHAC **does not recommend** the use of neck gaiters (also known as neck warmers), scarves and bandanas because they:

- Don’t include a filter layer
- Aren’t made of effective materials
- Are likely to move or slip out of place
- Aren't well secured to the head or ears
- Are difficult to remove without contaminating yourself

**Note:** If a respirator (e.g., N95) is required and used against a specific job hazard, they are considered 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 the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). For more information and related questions, please contact: [hsewb@yorku.ca](mailto:hsewb@yorku.ca).

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

### **3. When should I wear a mask?**

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

Please wear your mask when entering a building and for the entire duration of your stay. 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.

As of March 2022, unless otherwise indicated by the area, York does not require but continues to encourage physical distancing where it is reasonable. It is especially encouraged if masks are removed (e.g., while eating or drinking). There will continue to be global messaging to encourage everyone to give each other as much space as is available in any setting. Matters of personal space have become accentuated during the pandemic.

### **4. Who is exempt from wearing a mask at the University?**

Those exempt from the requirement to wear a mask include:

- Children who are under two years of age;
- Persons with an underlying medical condition that inhibits their ability to wear a mask
- Persons who are unable to place or remove a mask 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

There may be specific university areas that may have additional specific practices which fall under provincial guidelines and/or operational requirements. For any questions, please contact [hsewb@yorku.ca](mailto:hsewb@yorku.ca).

### **5. Do I need to wear a mask as an instructor while I am teaching?**

Yes, masks 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 materially impairs the effectiveness of a teaching activity, the mask can be temporarily removed. Unless otherwise indicated by the area, York does not require but continues to encourage physical distancing where it is reasonable. If a mask must be removed

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during teaching, it is encouraged to maintain 2-metres physical distance from others where possible. Please put the mask back on as soon as possible. All attempts must be made to wear a mask 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?**

Masks 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 can be temporarily removed while the door is closed (such as to eat lunch). If the door is open, the mask must be donned. The mask must be donned if and as soon as another individual enters another person's private space.

#### **7. Do I need to wear a mask in cubicle areas and shared workspaces?**

Masks must be worn while indoors and for the duration of your stay. However, they can be temporarily removed for urgent health purposes. York does not require (unless otherwise indicated by the area), but continues to encourage physical distancing where it is reasonable. It is especially encouraged if masks are removed (e.g., while eating or drinking). 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 in meeting rooms?**

York is requiring all individuals to wear a mask in all indoor settings, including meeting spaces. If a mask must be temporarily removed during a meeting, it is encouraged to maintain 2-metres physical distance from others where possible, 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.

#### **9. Do I need to wear a mask in a university vehicle?**

York requires all staff (drivers and passengers) operating or using university vehicles whether owned, leased or rented to be masked. It is encouraged to ask passengers to sit in the back to maintain physical distance. When individuals are **alone** in a secured and enclosed space such as a vehicle, the mask can be temporarily removed. The mask must be donned if another individual enters the vehicle. Please continue to properly clean and disinfect the vehicle, as applicable.

- Consider asking passengers to sit in the back to maintain physical distance.
- Consider improving fresh air circulation using the vehicle climate control system and opening windows.
- Avoid the recirculated air option.

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## **10. As a student, do I need to wear a mask in an instructional space (i.e., a classroom, studio, lab)?**

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

## **11. Can a mask be temporarily removed?**

Masks 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;
- 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. Unless otherwise indicated by the area, York does not require but continues to encourage physical distancing where it is reasonable. It is especially encouraged if masks are removed (e.g., while eating or drinking).
- When individuals are **alone** in a secured and enclosed space such as a private office, their mask may 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 must be worn appropriately.
- 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 (e.g., low blood sugar or to take medication)
- As may be necessary for the purposes of health and safety.

## **12. What if I cannot wear a mask?**

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: [York University Mask Protocol](#).

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

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- **Staff and faculty:** please contact Health, Safety and Employee Well Being at their confidential email address: [ewb@yorku.ca](mailto: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](mailto:sasreg@yorku.ca) for accommodation needs, including those related to masks
  - 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

Accommodation measures that are approved for employees or students that include a mask exemption will address undue hardship and community safety needs simultaneously. Unless indicated otherwise by the area, York does not require but continues to encourage physical distancing where it is reasonable. It is especially encouraged if masks are removed (e.g., while eating or drinking).

### **13. Do I need to wear a mask when outdoors?**

When we wear a well-fitted mask, whether indoors or outdoors, we protect ourselves and others. York encourages community members to wear a mask in outdoor settings when physical distancing cannot be maintained (e.g., lining up and congregating where it is not possible to maintain a 2-metres physical distance from others).

### **14. What are the qualities of a good mask?**

The Public Health Agency of Canada ([PHAC](#))’s states:

“Choose the best quality and best fitting respirator or mask available. Respirators (e.g. N95), medical masks and non-medical masks may 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.”

Medical masks and respirators (e.g. N95) are widely available for purchase. Their construction materials may vary, but must meet established filtration standards to be sold as medical masks and respirators in Canada.

The following information are drawn from the PHAC: “The effectiveness of non-medical masks varies based on material, construction, fit and proper use. Some are similarly effective to medical masks if they:

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

Using a filter as a middle layer in a non-medical mask can help to trap smaller infectious respiratory particles.

A filter can be included in your non-medical mask by:

- adding a filter fabric such as non-woven polypropylene as a middle layer
- inserting a disposable filter into a pocket on the inside of the mask
  - filters can be bought or hand-made by using a piece of filter fabric

You can wash reusable masks with an integrated filter layer multiple times.

Change disposable filters as per manufacturer's instructions. Remove them from the mask before washing.

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

- 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

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- 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.”

PHAC **does not recommend** the use of neck gaiters (also known as neck warmers), scarves and bandanas because they:

- Don't include a filter layer
- Aren't made of effective materials
- Are likely to move or slip out of place
- Aren't well secured to the head or ears
- Are difficult to remove without contaminating yourself

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

### **15. Does York University provide masks to those coming to campus?**

No, all community members are required to bring their own good quality mask to campus. However, if you are on campus and you realize that you have forgotten, lost, soiled or damaged your mask, medical masks and/or N95s will be available for purchase from the Bookstore (Keele Campus) or from vending machines on both campuses. For the vending machine closest to you, please [see this map](#).

Where supplies permit, masks will be freely available to community members across both campuses, including N95s, KN95s, Level 2 and Level 3 medical masks, as well as 3-layer cloth masks bundled with procedural masks. Educational materials will be made available with the different mask options to ensure proper usage.

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, it is 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.

**16. Is it recommended to wear a mask or a respirator with exhalation valves or exhaust valves?**

Public health authorities do **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.

**17. Is the use of clear plastic masks 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.

**18. How should I wear, remove, and care for a mask?**

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

**19. Why wear a mask?**

Wearing a mask 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, you also signal to others that you are doing your part to protect them from COVID-19.

**20. Can I wear a face shield instead of a mask?**

A face shield is not an alternative to a mask, according to [Toronto Public Health](#) and [PHAC](#). Face shields and goggles are primarily used to protect the eyes of the person wearing it, and they can be used in addition to masks. Goggles do not cover the nose

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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 the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

If you have a medical condition, disability or impairment that affects your ability to wear a mask 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](mailto: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](mailto:sasreg@yorku.ca).

## **21. What should I do if one of my colleagues, my students or my classmates is not wearing their mask?**

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. We ask that community members exercise discretion and patience should they see a fellow community member not wearing their mask.

In this case, it is encouraged to **maintain physical distancing and wear your mask** 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.

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. Students, see [YU Better Together Community of Care Commitment](#) for more information.

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

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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.

## **22. How do I protect myself if my colleague or classmate is not wearing a mask?**

Always follow the following health and safety measures:

- Maintain physical distancing, where possible.
- Wear your own well-fitted mask.
- Follow other public health measures, such as practicing respiratory etiquette and washing your hands frequently.

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](mailto:sasreg@yorku.ca)

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

### **References:**

- [Health and Safety Guidelines for the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- Public Health Agency of Canada [COVID-19 mask use: Advice for community settings](#)
- [Toronto Public Health Use of Face Masks](#) Factsheet
- [Toronto Public Health – COVID-19 Guidance: Post-Secondary Schools](#)

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