



COLORADO
Department of Public
Health & Environment

COVID-19

Questions & answers about the statewide mandatory mask order

covid19.colorado.gov/mask-guidance

ABOUT THE EXECUTIVE ORDER

What is the statewide mandatory mask order?

- Executive Order D 2020 138 requires all people in Colorado over ten (10) years old to wear a face-covering over their noses and mouths:
 - When entering or moving within any public indoor space.
 - While using or waiting to use public (buses, light-rail) or non-personal (taxis, car services, ride-shares) transportation services.
- People do **not** need to wear a mask when they are:
 - Hearing-impaired or otherwise disabled or who are communicating with someone who is hearing-impaired or otherwise disabled and where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication.
 - Seated at a food service establishment.
 - Exercising alone or with others from the individual's household, and a face covering would interfere with the activity.
 - Receiving a personal service where the temporary removal of the face-covering is necessary to perform the service.
 - Entering a business or receiving services and are asked to temporarily remove a face covering for identification purposes.
 - Are actively engaged in a public safety role such as law enforcement, firefighters, or emergency medical personnel.
 - Officiating at a religious service or life-rite event.
 - Giving a speech for broadcast or an audience, if the audience is at least 25 feet away from the speaker. The audience members must wear face coverings.

When does this executive order go into effect?

- The mandatory statewide mask order went into effect at midnight on July 16, 2020, and is in effect for 30 days. The executive order may be extended.

What is a public indoor space?

- For the mask order, “public indoor space” means a publicly or privately owned, managed, or operated, enclosed indoor area that is accessible to the public, is a place of employment or is an entity that provides services. Public indoor space does not mean a person’s residence, including a room in a motel or hotel or a residential room for students at an educational facility. Public indoor spaces include but are not limited to:
 - Government buildings.
 - Nonprofits.
 - Transportation.
 - Houses of worship.
 - Private country clubs or social clubs.
 - Grocery stores.
 - Hair salons.
 - All offices, lobbies, elevators.
 - Malls, retail stores.
 - Indoor businesses, common areas.
 - Medical facilities, nursing homes.
 - Restaurants (if not seated).
 - Libraries.
 - Museums.
 - Theaters.
 - Casinos.
 - Gyms, including areas around indoor pools, but not while swimming in the pool.
 - If a business or entity provides services or goods both indoors and outdoors at a single location, a mask must be worn in the indoor portion of that business or entity.
 - All enclosed indoor areas, whether publicly or privately owned or managed, except an individual’s residence.

Is the mask order a law?

- Yes, executive orders and public health orders have the force of law. People who do not comply with the executive order may be subject to civil or criminal penalties.

Why did the state wait to issue mandatory mask orders?

- The governor and state public health officials know masks are one of the most effective tools we currently have to limit the spread of COVID-19, but orders are often best issued and enforced at the local level. While more than thirty-nine (39) Colorado cities and counties have mask orders, others do not. A statewide order helps eliminate confusion and makes mask requirements more consistent across the state.
- Many business owners asked for this statewide order because it eliminates inconsistency for patrons from different counties. The executive order requires businesses to refuse service to customers who are not wearing masks, which in turn will help slow the spread of the virus and ensure businesses can remain open with precautions during the pandemic.

Why is age 10 the cutoff for the mask requirement?

- Children 10 years and younger are not required to wear masks because the evidence so far has shown that children in this age group are much less likely to spread COVID-19 than older children and adults. It is also less likely that children of this age will wear a mask correctly.

Who has to wear a mask?

- The order applies to people in Colorado over 10 years old when they are in a public indoor space or when they are waiting for or using public transportation or ride-shares.

Who does not have to wear a mask?

- People who are 10 years old and younger.
- People who cannot medically tolerate a face covering.
- Children ages 2 and under should NOT wear masks or cloth face coverings.

What does it mean to be unable to medically tolerate a face covering?

- Essentially, this means a person who has trouble breathing or anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face-covering without assistance, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Read more from the CDC](#) about other reasons face coverings may not be possible in every situation or for some people.

How do I prove I cannot medically tolerate a face covering? Do I need a written exemption?

- You do not need a written exemption.
- You may tell the establishment that you cannot medically tolerate a mask. But please be aware that if you cannot medically tolerate a mask, you should consider limiting any visits to businesses to protect yourself and others. If you need help getting groceries or other necessities, you can call 211 to be connected to local resources that may be able to help you.
- Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, businesses may offer reasonable accommodations for individuals with medical disabilities that make it so that they can't wear a mask. This could include offering delivery or call-ahead curbside pickup instead of allowing entry into the building. [More information](#).
 - The CDC recommends businesses post a sign outside that says "Masks Required" and provide a phone number and email address for someone to contact should they be unable to use a mask.

Is there guidance available regarding both mask order and ADA compliance?

- Yes. If someone is unable to wear a mask due to a medical exemption, we encourage businesses to work with those exempted individuals to create alternative accommodations such as curbside pickup or delivery. For more information, refer to the [Guidance to Employers and Places of Public Accommodation Regarding Equal Opportunity Employment and Reasonable Accommodations Due to the Presence of COVID-19](#).

ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Do I have to wear a mask outdoors?

- The executive order does not state that you must wear a mask outdoors unless you are waiting on public or non-personal transportation.
- However, it is best to wear a mask whenever you cannot keep a safe distance (at least 6 feet) from other people. We encourage you to wear a mask whenever you are in crowded spaces, either indoors or out.

Do I have to wear a mask at grocery or hardware stores?

- Yes, you must wear a mask when entering any kind of store.

Do I have to wear a mask at a restaurant?

- Yes, you must wear a mask when entering or exiting a restaurant. You may take the mask off when you are seated but must put it back on when you stand up to use the restroom or to leave.

Does this apply to houses of worship?

- Yes, this applies to any indoor setting open to members of the public. If there are specific religious spaces where members of the public are not allowed, such as spaces only accessible by clergy, then this does not apply to those limited settings.
- Clergy are not required to wear face coverings while officiating at a religious service.

Do parties to a marriage need to wear a mask during their ceremony?

- No, masks may be removed if they would interfere with the performance of a life-rite ceremony. If they do not interfere with the ceremony, they should continue to be worn. For example, if parties to a marriage need to speak vows to an audience, they may remove their masks.

Does a speaker in a conference space — in which all attendees are masked and are 6-plus feet apart — need to wear a mask while speaking?

- You may remove your mask if delivering a speech to an audience. Please put your mask back on as soon as you are able. If you remove your mask to deliver a speech, please note that we ask performers to be 25 feet away from the audience.

Do face coverings have to be worn in courthouses (i.e., during trial)?

- Unless it interferes with the integrity of the proceedings, mask-wearing is required. However, we recognize that the judicial branch is independent of the executive branch and may need to propose rules specific to trials (e.g., witnesses) that are reasonable and may require temporary removal of a mask. Judges are permitted to set rules for both their courthouse and individual trials.

SPORTS AND RECREATION

Do I need to wear a mask while exercising at an indoor gym?

- Mask-wearing requirements apply to everyone indoors, including people exercising. If you are in an indoor room with other patrons who are not a part of your household, then you need to wear a mask. You may remove it temporarily if you need to catch your breath or safely perform an activity, but wear a mask as much as feasible.

What about indoor sports?

- Masks should be worn while playing indoor sports unless it interferes with the activity. You may remove the mask temporarily to catch your breath if needed, or if you can't wear appropriate safety equipment while wearing the mask. Wear a mask as much as feasible.

What if I'm swimming in an indoor pool?

- You should take your mask off while swimming in the pool, but you must put it back on while you are not swimming but in the pool area.

Do lifeguards at indoor pools have to wear masks?

- Lifeguards may remove their mask if they need to do so in order to safely perform an activity.

ENFORCEMENT

What will happen if I refuse to wear a mask?

- If you refuse to wear a mask as required in the executive order, you are violating a Colorado law and may be subject to civil or criminal penalties. You may also be in violation of county or municipal ordinances and subject to a ticket and/or fine.

- If you are asked to leave a store due to failure to wear a mask, and you refuse, you may be charged with trespassing.

What happens if a business does not comply with the mask order?

- A licensed business is at risk of losing its license.

What should business owners or employees do if patrons refuse to wear a mask?

- Businesses should refuse service to individuals not wearing masks. If a patron becomes combative or refuses to leave, contact local law enforcement, who can help diffuse the situation or intervene if the individual fails to comply.

IN THE WORKPLACE

Is it ever OK to remove my mask at work?

- **What if I'm alone in my office with the door closed?**
 - If you are the only person in a room with the door closed, then you may remove your mask. If someone else enters the room, please put your mask back on. You must wear a mask in common areas like hallways, elevators, or breakrooms.
- **Sitting at my cubicle spaced 6 feet away from my closest neighbor?**
 - You must wear a mask in any shared, indoor space that accommodates people outside your household. This includes spaces divided by physically distanced cubicles. We require masks in such settings because Colorado has recently experienced outbreaks in indoor, office-based settings. We continue to encourage employers to prioritize work from home.
- **In the elevator? Break room? Hallway?**
 - You must wear a mask in common areas like hallways, elevators, or breakrooms. If a common space is used for consuming meals (i.e., break rooms), follow [restaurant guidance](#) for that setting.

What do businesses need to do to comply with the mask order?

- The executive order states indoor businesses must refuse service to people who are not wearing masks.
- Businesses must post signs at entrances that instruct customers they must wear a mask when entering or moving around inside the business.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends adding a phone number and email address people unable to use a mask can contact. This will reduce the potential that an employee will have to manage a situation with an uncooperative, un-masked person.
- Businesses should consider implementing alternatives to in-person service, such as curbside pick-up, contactless delivery, or assistance with services/products available online.

Are there any situations in which a plexiglass barrier can replace the face-covering requirement indoors? Can plexiglass barriers be installed in public offices rather than requiring masks?

- No. Plexiglass barriers may not substitute for face coverings. They may provide an added benefit, but cannot be used as a substitute.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Can cities and counties opt out of the statewide mask order?

- Counties that are certified for [Protect Our Neighbors](#) status may choose to be exempt from the statewide mask order.

Can counties or municipalities have more restrictive orders?

- Yes, counties and municipalities can adopt stricter standards than the statewide order.

How do I know if my county or municipality has different orders?

- Your [local public health agency](#) is a good source of information for orders within your county.

Do face coverings have to be worn in courthouses (i.e., during trial)?

- Unless it interferes with the integrity of the proceedings, mask-wearing is required. However, we recognize that the judicial branch is independent of the executive branch and may need to propose rules specific to trials (e.g., witnesses) that are reasonable and may require temporary removal of a mask. Judges are permitted to set rules for both their courthouse and individual trials.

MASK BASICS

Is there a specific kind of mask people need to wear?

- You should wear something that covers your nose and mouth -- a cloth face covering or a disposable mask.
- The best mask for you is one you can wear comfortably and consistently. Any mask or face-covering that covers the nose and mouth will work.
- We encourage you to use cloth face coverings to preserve medical mask supplies for health care and other essential workers.

Does a face shield that covers the nose and mouth meet the mask requirement?

- No, a face shield is not an acceptable substitute for a cloth or disposable face covering.

What is the difference between a mask and a face covering?

- Masks and face-coverings are interchangeable terms. Cloth masks or face coverings or disposable masks are acceptable as long as they cover the nose and mouth.
- People may wear surgical or other, more protective masks, but we encourage people to use cloth face coverings to preserve medical masks for health care and other essential workers.
- While at work, people should wear masks appropriate to the business in which they work.

If we are social distancing, why do we still need to wear masks?

- It is becoming increasingly evident that masks are an inexpensive and easy way to limit disease spread. Together, masks and distancing offer a greater measure of protection. We strongly encourage all people in Colorado to practice the Big 3: Wear a mask. Wash your hands. Keep your distance.
- Face coverings are most important when distancing is difficult. People who are unable to wear a face-covering should take other measures to reduce their risk, including distancing, frequent hand washing, and disinfecting surfaces.

Where do I get a mask?

- You can make or buy your own. You can use a bandana or scarf. [ColoradoMaskProject.com](https://coloradomaskproject.com) has resources to help you make or buy a mask. The CDC has a [video about making your own mask](#).

How should a mask fit?

- Face coverings should:
 - Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face.
 - 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.
 - Cover your nose and mouth. Wearing them under your nose or chin is ineffective.

How do I clean and sterilize my mask?

- Wash your cloth mask regularly with your regular laundry.

How do I put on and take off the mask?

- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth when putting on and taking off your face covering. Hold the mask by the corners and avoid touching the front or back of it. Wash your hands before putting your mask on and right after you remove it.

Where can I find out more?

- The [CDC](#) and [CDPHE](#) web pages are excellent resources.

Can I get carbon dioxide poisoning or lowered oxygen levels from wearing a mask?

- According to the [Mayo Clinic Health System](#), “for many years, health care providers have worn masks for extended periods of time with no adverse health reactions ... there is no risk of hypoxia, which is lower oxygen levels in healthy adults. Carbon dioxide will freely diffuse through your mask as you breathe.”

What is the most recent science behind universal mask-wearing?

- Masks appear to help keep the person wearing the mask from spreading COVID-19 to others by reducing the amount and distance infectious particles can spread through [partial filtering](#) of said particles.
- New evidence also suggests masks may also partially protect the wearer, especially from severe infection, by potentially reducing [viral inoculation dose](#) and/or [face touching](#).
- Individuals are thought to be best protected when both they and most others in their community wear masks.
- In one instance, infected passengers on the Diamond Princess cruise ship, where widespread masking was not used during an outbreak, had only an [18% asymptomatic rate](#). Infected passengers on the Ernest Shackleton cruise ship, where widespread masking was implemented during an outbreak, had an [81% asymptomatic rate](#).
- In another instance, a seafood processing plant in Oregon that implemented universal mask-wearing had a [95% asymptomatic rate among 124 infected workers](#).
- In yet another instance, two infected hair salon employees in Missouri [did not transmit any apparent infections to any of their 139 clients](#) in the setting of mask use by them and nearly all of their clients.
- Additionally, at a pediatric hemodialysis unit in Indiana which required universal masking, exposure to one symptomatic patient with COVID-19 likely resulted in [marked asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic seroconversion among other patients \(23%\) and staff \(44%\)](#).
- [Hamsters simulated to wear masks](#) had less severe COVID-19 infection than hamsters who were not simulated to wear masks when exposed to the virus.
- [A recent meta-analysis](#) suggests mask use may reduce infection rates by nearly 65%.
- A CDC editorial providing further evidence and advocating for universal mask-wearing is [here](#).