



Use of non-medical masks

June 2020

Background

As countries have navigated the COVID-19 pandemic, more information has come to light about the best and most effective way to utilize non-medical face masks for the general public. Medical grade masks such as surgical masks or N95 (N95 denote a respirator that filters 95% of small particulates) respirators should always be reserved for healthcare providers at the point of care, because ensuring care providers have access to these masks is imperative and necessary for their safety. That noted, as information about COVID-19 has evolved, public health agencies across the world and certainly in Canada have adjusted their recommendations around the use of non-medical masks for the general public. Public health officials (Dr. Theresa Tam and Dr. Bonnie Henry), have noted that masks should be considered an extra layer of protection for people when unable to maintain the two metre physical distancing protocols. Non-medical masks do not substitute for physical distancing, proper and frequent hand-washing, staying home when sick and covering coughs and sneezes, but they can provide an important layer of protection when used properly and with due care.

As experts in public health, nurses are well versed in infection prevention protocols and procedures and they fully understand disease prevention and health promotion. Moreover, nurses consistently rank among the world's most trusted professionals. As such, nurses have an important obligation to help the public understand the benefits, and importance of non-medical face coverings.

Key Messages

- NNPBC supports the use of non-medical face masks for those able to wear them safely in situations where physical distancing is either difficult or not possible such as on public transit, in stores and other public spaces.
- NNPBC encourages everyone to watch any of the short informational videos found online (and below) with instructions for how to properly put on and take off (don and doff) these masks.
- Masks provide an extra layer of protection for the wearer but are not a substitute for proper and frequent hand washing, staying home when ill, covering coughs and sneezes and physical distancing.
- Non-medical masks should be disposed of properly if wet or dirty.
- Non-Medical masks should allow for easy breathing, fit securely over the ears, fit over the mouth and nose and be made of at least two layers of tightly woven material such as cotton or linen.
- Non-Medical masks should be comfortable to encourage frequent use when suggested.
- Non-medical masks should never be shared, be used on children under two years of age, be made with non-breathable material, impair vision or be used if someone has trouble breathing.
- *Medical* masks should be reserved for use by licensed healthcare providers for use at the point of care and should not be worn by the general public.
- Nurses can serve as key role models in choosing to wear non-medical masks when out in public.



Further Reading/Resources

- [WHO- When and How to use a Mask](#)
- [Non-medical masks: How to put on, remove and clean](#)
- [Canadians should wear masks as an added layer of protection](#)
- [Government of Canada- non-medical face coverings](#)
- [BCCDC- Masks](#)
- [BC's Top Doctor recommends non-medical masks](#)

Please feel free to direct questions and additional comments to info@nnpbc.com.