Face masks - when to wear a face mask

Information about when to wear a face mask in Victoria

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Can businesses refuse service to someone if they are not wearing a face mask?

Businesses should not refuse service to patrons who may have a lawful reason for not wearing a face mask at venues that require mandatory masks. For more information on face masks and human rights, visit the website of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

Can I remove my mask to consume alcoholic beverages in public?

No, you are not allowed to remove a mask to drink an alcoholic beverage outside of your home.

You may remove a mask for the purposes of drinking non-alcoholic beverages, eating and taking medicine.

Wearing a face mask

Where can I get a face mask?

You can purchase cloth masks or surgical masks from retail outlets including chemists, hardware stores and other shops, or you can follow our directions to make your own cloth mask.

Face shields on their own do not meet the face covering requirements in the Directions currently in force.

Can I wear my face mask under my nose or chin?

No, wearing a face mask under your nose or chin does not provide protection to you or others. You need to wear your face mask securely around the face, specifically covering the nose and the mouth areas.

Can I remove my face mask to smoke or use an e-cigarette?

Yes, subject to existing restrictions on smoking in public places in Victoria.

The hand-to-mouth action of smoking and e-cigarette use means that people who smoke may be more vulnerable to COVID-19, as they are touching their face and mouth more often. You should wash your hands as soon as you finish and should not share an individual cigarette or vaping device.

How do I stop my face mask fogging up my glasses?

Make sure the face mask is fitted and pinched on your nose if possible. Put your glasses on after the face mask. Wash your glasses with detergent and water to create a film to prevent fogging. You can also use micropore tape (available at all pharmacies) to tape the mask along the bridge of your nose and cheeks, then put your glasses on top. Or put a folded tissue across the bridge of your nose, then put your face mask on and your glasses on top.

I wear a hearing aid, what tips do you have for me about wearing a face mask?

If you wear a hearing aid you need to be careful when putting on or taking off your face mask to ensure you don't lose your hearing aid or get your face mask tangled in it. Consider using a face mask that ties around the head, rather than over the ears as this will keep the ties free from your hearing aid.

If you are having trouble communicating with someone who is wearing a face mask you can ask them to speak louder or to remove their mask during your conversation. You should maintain physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres from others.

Is a scarf or bandana an appropriate face covering?

You must wear a fitted face mask that covers the nose and mouth, designed to protect you from COVID-19. It does not mean a scarf or bandana or loose snood or loose gaiter.

The Chief Health Officer recommends a mask with 3 layers that fits securely around the face, specifically covering the nose and the mouth.

Can I remove my face mask to talk with other people?

If you are in a setting where face masks are mandatory, such as on public transport or in a taxi or ride-share vehicle, you can remove your face mask if you are communicating with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.

Exceptions for not wearing a face mask

Lawful excuses or exceptions for not wearing a face mask

A face mask is not required to be worn in some circumstances including for:

- Infants and children under the age of 12 years.
- Students at primary school or after school hours care at a primary school.
- Persons who have a physical or mental health illness or condition, or disability, which makes wearing a face covering unsuitable, including persons with obstructed breathing, a serious skin condition of the face, an intellectual disability, a mental health condition or persons who have experienced trauma.
- The person is at a premises that is their ordinary place of residence or their temporary place of residence.
- The person is visiting a person with whom they are in an intimate personal relationship with.
- Persons communicating with those who are deaf or hard of hearing and visibility of the mouth is essential for communication.
- Persons for whom the nature of their work or education means that wearing a face mask creates a risk to health and safety.
- Persons for whom the nature of their work or education means that clear enunciation or visibility of their mouth is essential. This includes teaching, lecturing or broadcasting.
- The person is working by themselves in an enclosed indoor space such as an office unless and until another person enters that space.
- The person is working by themselves in an outdoor space, provided no other person is also in the outdoor space (except a person who ordinarily resides at the same premises with them).
- When asked to remove the face mask to ascertain identity. For instance, where asked by police, security, bank or post office staff to remove a face mask to ascertain identity.
- The person is one of two persons being married while in the process of being married.
- The person is a professional sportsperson when training or competing.
- Persons who are engaged in any strenuous physical exercise such as running, jogging, swimming or cycling.
- The person is riding a bicycle or motorcycle.
- The person is undergoing dental or medical care or treatment to the extent that such care or treatment requires no face mask be worn.
- The person is smoking or vaping (including e-cigarettes) while stationary.
- The person is consuming food, non-alcoholic drink or medicine.
- Persons receiving or providing a service from a facility which is permitted to operate under the Restricted Activity Directions (Victoria), to the extent that it is not reasonably practicable to receive or provide that service while wearing a face mask (for example, beard trimmings)
- If required or authorised by law.
- The person is travelling in a vehicle by themselves or with members of their household.
- The person is a prisoner in a prison, subject to any policies of that prison.
- The person is detained in a remand centre, youth residential centre or youth justice centre, subject to any policies of that centre.
- The person is escaping harm or the risk of harm, including harm relating to family violence or violence of another person.
- For emergency purposes.
- Where not doing so is not safe in all the circumstances.

People with lawful excuses for not wearing a face mask should still keep at least 1.5 metres apart from others, practice regular hand hygiene by washing or sanitising hands frequently, continue to comply with the Directions currently in force, and get tested if unwell (even with mild symptoms). Find out more about staying safe.

I have a medical condition that prevents me from wearing a face mask, do I need a medical certificate stating I don't need to wear a face mask?

You do not need a medical certificate stating that you have a lawful reason for not wearing a face mask. If you have a lawful reason for not wearing a face mask, you do not need to apply for an exemption or permit.

If you are stopped by police in a setting where face masks are mandatory, they will ask you to confirm the lawful reason you are not wearing a face mask.

Do people with a disability have to wear a face mask?

Yes, people with a disability must wear a face mask in settings where it is mandatory, unless the person has a physical or mental health illness or condition, or disability, which makes wearing a face mask unsuitable (for instance, due to medical, physical, communication or other individual risk factors).

I have a lawful exception for not wearing a face mask – can I wear a face shield or other face covering?

You can choose to wear a face shield on its own if you have a lawful reason for not wearing a face mask. Other types of coverings, including specially designed face coverings, can be worn by people who have a lawful exception to provide a level of protection against COVID-19 transmission

What about people who have experienced trauma that makes it difficult for them to wear a face mask?

Some people who have past experiences of trauma are unable to wear a face mask due to psychological impacts. This is a lawful reason not to wear a face mask. You do not need to carry or produce evidence proving that you are eligible for this exception.

Can I take my face mask off if someone I am communicating with can't hear me?

You can remove your face mask if you are communicating with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing and the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.

You should maintain physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres and if you need to cough or sneeze, do so into a tissue or your elbow.

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24/7 Coronavirus Hotline

If you suspect you may have COVID-19 call the dedicated hotline – open 24 hours, 7 days.

Please keep Triple Zero (000) for emergencies only.

1800 675 398

Was this page helpful? Yes No

The Victorian Government acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and acknowledges and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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