

Mandatory masks in indoor public places and on public transportation – updated July 31

When do masks become mandatory?

Non-medical masks are mandatory on public transportation as of July 24 and in indoor public places as of July 31.

What does ‘indoor public places’ mean?

Indoor public places means places where the public is fully expected to be or has ready access to. See the full list and further explanation below.

Where are masks mandatory?

Non-medical masks are mandatory for employees, customers and the general public in the following indoor public places:

- retail businesses
- shopping centres
- personal services businesses such as a hair and nail salons, spas, body art facilities, except during services that require removing a mask
- restaurants and bars, except while you are eating or drinking
- places of worship or faith gatherings
- places for cultural or entertainment services or activities such as movie theatres, concerts, and other performances
- places for sports and recreational activities such as a gym, pool, or indoor tennis facility, except during an activity where a mask cannot be worn
- rental halls or rooms for special events such as conferences and receptions, faith gatherings, weddings and funerals, and arts and culture events
- municipal or provincial government locations offering services to the public
- common areas of tourist accommodations such as lobbies, elevators and hallways
- common areas of office buildings such as lobbies, elevators and hallways, but not private offices
- public areas of a university or college campus such as library, student union building or common areas of a faculty building, but not classrooms, labs, offices or residences
- train or bus stations, ferry terminals, and airports

Masks are mandatory for drivers and passengers on:

- municipal transit buses and ferries
- school buses
- motor coaches (except those that provide charters or tours)
- community transit vehicles
- private taxis and shuttles

For the purposes of this requirement, public transportation does not include:

- private vehicles for transporting employees
- provincial ferries, such as the ones at Englishtown and LaHave

- ferries between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, PEI, and Newfoundland

Why are you doing this now? Why not at the beginning of the pandemic?

The evidence on non-medical masks has evolved through the pandemic, and our public health direction has evolved along with it. We have learned that non-medical masks are effective, in combination with other core personal public health measures, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Before a second wave arrives, we need to make mask wearing a habit for Nova Scotians.

This is a very big change for businesses and workplaces. How is government helping them transition?

We are looking at ways to make sure people are able to access a mask regardless of their situation. We are also working on resources to help owners of affected public places to communicate that masks are mandatory in their spaces. We are posting them at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/resources/>.

What about people who can't afford a mask or who forget theirs?

Many masks are very affordable, but we are looking at ways to make sure people are able to access a mask regardless of their situation. We've provided some supplies to public transit, taxis, and others. If you can't buy or make a mask, you can get free reusable masks through library and museum locations around the province. We're also providing some to small businesses so they can distribute to people who have difficulty accessing one. Small businesses can email NSEconomy@novascotia.ca to ask for masks for this purpose.

How will this be enforced? Are there fines for not wearing a mask?

We are taking a cooperative and positive approach to mandatory masking rather than an enforcement approach. We have confidence that the vast majority of Nova Scotians will do the right thing and wear one. People should also be aware that businesses have the right to refuse them entry or refuse to serve them if they don't follow the rules, always with allowances for the small number of people with valid reasons for not wearing a mask.

What happens if someone refuses to put on a mask or takes it off once they go inside? Can they be refused service or kicked out?

Businesses, workplaces, and other owners can develop their own policies and procedures. They can choose to refuse entry or service to people who are not following the rules.

Should businesses and workplaces put up signs saying masks are mandatory?

Businesses, organizations and workplaces where masks are required under the public health order (or under their own policies) are encouraged to post a sign to let customers and clients know that masks are mandatory. There is a downloadable Face Mask Required sign here: <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Face-Masks-Required-Poster.pdf>

What parts of a space can a retail business consider private?

Some businesses have both public and private spaces. For example, the public has access to a clothing store but does not have ready access to the stock room or back office. They have access to the showroom or waiting area at a car dealership but they do not have access to the bay where mechanics work. The mask requirement applies to the spaces the public has ready access to, not the private spaces. Business owners/employers can choose to set their own policies for private spaces.

Does every single office worker need to wear a mask? What if you're alone in your office with the door closed? What if your cubicle is 2 metres away from the next one?

In an office building, masks are required in the common areas such as the lobby, elevators and hallways. Once you enter a private business's space, masks are not mandatory under the public health order. A private business may set its own policies for mask use.

Masks are mandatory in parts of offices where municipal or provincial government services are offered to the public. Municipalities and provincial departments may set their own policies for mask use in other parts of these offices.

If you have plexiglass in place as a barrier, do you still need to wear a mask?

Yes. While the plexiglass provides an immediate barrier if someone coughs toward it, the virus can still move in the air around it. This is the case in buildings and vehicles where plexiglass is installed (unless it is 100% sealed, which is not typical). So masks are still necessary to protect everyone.

Are masks required in the common areas of private building, like a manufacturing facility?

No, this would be a private space that is not readily accessible by the public. However, the business owner could choose to set its own policy for mask use in its facility.

Are masks mandatory in lobbies, elevators and hallways of apartment and condo buildings?

No, you don't need to wear a mask in common areas of apartment or condo buildings. These are considered private, residential spaces.

What are common areas of university or college campuses where masks are required?

Masks are required in common areas that the public has access to like the library, student union building, and common areas of a faculty building. They are not required in classrooms, labs, offices, or residences.

How can you wear a mask if you're having a meal or a drink in a restaurant or bar?

You can remove your mask to eat and drink. At any other time in a restaurant, bar or other indoor public place where food is served, you must wear a mask – for example, waiting to be seated, going to the bathroom, and getting ready to leave.

Do you need to wear a mask on a restaurant patio or at an outdoor eating establishment?

No, but you need to wear a mask if you have to pass through an indoor section of restaurant to reach the outdoor section.

Do you need to wear a mask at an indoor church or community supper?

Yes, you could remove your mask to eat, but otherwise must keep it on while you are in this place.

Do you have to wear a mask if you're involved in a court proceeding?

Masks are not required in a courtroom but are required in common areas outside the actual courtroom.

Isn't it unsafe to wear a mask if you're getting your heart rate up at the gym or during a sports practice?

If you're at an indoor public place and you're doing a physical activity where a mask cannot be worn, you can remove your mask for the duration of the activity, but you must wear it at all other times in the facility.

Doesn't that mean you could remove your mask for just about any indoor sport or any physical activity at the gym?

There are all kinds of physical activities that you can do while wearing a mask and some where you cannot. People need to use common sense.

How can you wear a mask in a pool? Wouldn't that be unsafe? If you can take it off to go in the pool, where do you put it?

You are not required to wear a mask in the pool, but you must wear it at all other times in the facility. Managing how this is done is up to the facility.

Do you have to wear a mask in places with private membership, like a clubhouse of a golf course?

If a business like a golf course only allows people with memberships to enter, then this is a private space where masks are not mandatory under the public health order. The owner could choose to set his/her own policy, and we encourage that.

However, if the business allows people to pay as they go (like a day pass or buying a round of golf), then it is a space that the public readily has access to and masks are mandatory.

If you rent a room (such as at a hotel) for private business meeting, are masks required? What about if you're renting it for a large wedding reception?

Masks are not required if you rent a public space for a private meeting but you are limited to 50 people and must ensure physical distancing. Masks are required if you are renting a space to host special events like a conference or reception, arts and culture events, and faith gatherings, weddings or funerals.

Is a tent for a wedding reception or other special event considered an indoor public space?

If the tent is set up for special events like a conference or reception, arts and culture events, and faith gatherings, weddings or funerals where the general public is expected to be, then it is a public space. And if the side flaps are down, it becomes enclosed so masks would be required.

If the tent is set up on a person's private property for an invitation-only event, then it's not a public space. Note that even in private spaces, we strongly recommend masks be used when there are larger gatherings because it can be difficult to maintain physical distance.

Are masks required in a building that has doors that can open an entire side?

If it's a rental space for special events like a conference or reception, arts and culture events, and faith gatherings, weddings or funerals, then masks would be required because the space is still enclosed enough to pose a risk.

If it's not a rental space and it's private property – for example, a barn with large open doors on one side – then masks would not be required. Note that even in private spaces, we strongly recommend masks be used when there are larger gatherings because it can be difficult to maintain physical distance.

Do people have to wear a mask while they are waiting for a bus, or just when they get on one?

We strongly recommend people wear masks when physical distancing is difficult. At some bus stops, especially inside and around main terminals, there can be a lot of people so even if you are waiting outside, you should wear a mask. If there are very few people and lots of room for distancing, you don't need to wear the mask while you wait.

Are masks mandatory for people in their own private vehicles? What about people carpooling?

People do not need to wear a mask in their own private vehicles. We would strongly recommend that

they do if they are carpooling or if they need to drive someone who is not in their household or close social group.

Are masks mandatory for limos and other car services?

Yes, we consider limos and other car services to be the same as taxis.

With the barber and cosmetology sector plans, clients can remove their masks for a beard trim or a facial. Will those services continue with mask removed? Or will these services no longer be allowed?

People can remove their masks to get these services. This is addressed in the reopening plans for these types of businesses.

Do you have to wear a mask through an entire performance or movie or bingo? What about eating snacks at the movies?

Yes, you must keep your mask on at these venues, but you can remove it while you are eating or drinking.

Do you have to wear a mask if you're leading a faith service or performing music or in a play?

Officiants and performers are exempt from wearing a mask while they are performing, talking or singing at faith gatherings, social events, special events, weddings and funerals, or arts and culture events. This does not apply to participants or audiences at the event.

Can we sing in church now that everyone has to wear masks?

Singing in groups is still a high risk activity and we continue to discourage it, even with masks.

Does everyone at a wedding have to wear a mask? Including the bride and groom? What about for their wedding photos?

Masks can be temporarily removed for ceremonial reasons such as bride and groom during their marriage ceremony or wedding photos.

If you're only interacting with your family or close social group at a gathering or in a public place, can you remove your mask?

You must keep your mask on because when there are other people around, it can be difficult to ensure physical distancing between your group and others.

If you're trying on clothes in a fitting room in a store, do you have to wear a mask? What if it comes off when you're changing?

You must wear your mask in the fitting room. If it comes off, put it back on.

If you are trying on glasses frames, do you have to wear a mask? Wouldn't the elastics around your ears get in the way of getting the right fit?

You must wear your mask. Optometrists have a plan for operating safely that addresses this situation.

How do you receive communion at church if you have to wear a mask? Can you take it off for that?

Masks can be temporarily removed for ceremonial reasons such as communion.

Can a business ask you to remove your mask for identification purposes?

Yes, businesses are allowed to ask and people are allowed to comply by momentarily removing their mask.

Can you take your mask off in a government office to get your drivers license? What about a photography business to get a passport photo taken?

Yes, a government office/photography business will instruct you when it is safe and appropriate to remove your mask in order to obtain a photo for identification purposes. Physical distancing must be maintained while the photo is being taken.

What if the environment is noisy and you can't make yourself heard without taking off your mask?

You must wear your mask. If the environment is noisy, you can move to a quieter location to make yourself heard.

If you are with people who, for various reasons, need to see your mouth moving while you speak, do you have to wear a mask?

If you are in one of the indoor public places listed in the public health order, you must wear your mask. There are window model masks available for purchase and also instructions on how to make one here: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/wearing-a-face-covering-in-public-settings-in-the-context-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

Do children have to wear masks?

Children under two are exempt, as well children aged two to four when their parent or caregiver cannot get them to wear a mask. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to help their children become comfortable with wearing a mask. There are some helpful tips here:

<https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/family-resources-education/700childrens/2020/05/helping-kids-get-used-to-seeing-and-wearing-masks>

Does this change the requirements you announced for schools?

This announcement does not change the Back to School Plan. Masks are not generally required within the public school classroom setting. High school students who go to different classrooms throughout the day need to wear masks in hallways. Some staff and students may choose to wear a mask at other times. Non-medical masks are required for children and bus drivers on public transportation including school buses.

Are masks required in daycares and day camps?

Children are not required to wear a mask in a child care setting, although some families may choose for their child to wear a mask. Masks are not required at day camps where physical distancing can be maintained between cohorts. However, some staff and children may choose to bring and wear one.

What are medical reasons for not wearing a mask?

There is relatively small number of valid medical reasons to not wear a mask. The Canadian Thoracic Society states that there is no evidence that wearing a mask worsens a chronic lung condition such as asthma or COPD.

For some people with chronic breathing conditions or mental health conditions, wearing a mask can create anxiety. In many cases, there are ways to overcome anxiety such as practicing wearing a mask for short periods of time at home. We recognize this won't work for everyone.

There are also some people with cognitive or developmental disabilities who are unable to wear a mask.

What are some ways that businesses can accommodate people who can't wear a mask?

Businesses are likely able to find solutions that work in their settings if they talk to their customers about possible options. For example, if physical distancing is possible, you could simply let the person enter and remind them to follow your measures for physical distancing. In some cases, it might make sense to book an appointment.

Some people say wearing a mask can make you sick, like inhaling too much carbon dioxide or not getting enough oxygen. Is there any truth to that?

That is absolutely false. Other than children under two and people with a valid medical reason for not wearing a mask, there is no health hazard associated with wearing one. Medical professionals and others wear masks all day, every day. There is no reason why the majority of Nova Scotians can't wear one for shorter periods of time.

Can you get a document to show proving that you have a medical reason for not wearing a mask?

We will not issue or ask for a medical certificate so please do not go to your doctor's office asking for one. Please do not look for reasons to not wear a mask. Likewise, please accommodate people and employees who cannot wear a mask and do not require them to have a document confirming it.

Please be aware of a fake document that is circulating that suggests it is proof from public health officials that the bearer cannot wear a mask. No public health agency has authorized this document.

What constitutes a non-medical mask? Could anything that covers the nose and mouth be accepted?

We encourage using a traditional non-medical mask that fits your snugly against your face and is held on with loops around your ears or ties around your head. There are many local suppliers making and selling them, and while prices vary, some are quite economical. You can also make one with a piece of cloth folded in at least two layers of fabric. The Public Health Agency of Canada offers instructions:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/sew-no-sew-instructions-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>

How do you properly wear a non-medical mask?

People should learn how to put on and take off a mask safely. When wearing a mask, you should:

- check the mask for tears or holes
- make sure the mask is clean and dry
- wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after touching the mask
- make sure your hair is away from your face
- use the ear loops or ties to put the mask over your nose and mouth and secure to your head or ears with its ties or elastics
- check that the mask fits snugly to the cheeks and fully covers your nose and mouth (there shouldn't be any gaps)
- avoid touching your face

When removing a mask, you should:

- wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol
- remove the mask by un-tying it or removing the loops from your ears

- avoid touching the front of the mask

What do you do with your mask while you're not wearing it?

After wearing your mask, inspect it for tears or holes. If it's damaged, put it in the garbage – please do not litter. When your reusable mask becomes damp or dirty, wash it with hot, soapy water and let it dry completely before wearing it again. You can include a cloth mask with other laundry. Store your mask in a clean place until you need to wear it again.

Can you wear a face shield in place of a non-medical mask?

No, for the purposes of this new rule, a face shield cannot be worn instead of a non-medical mask. This is because a face shield protects the wearer's eyes, but it does not protect other people if the wearer coughs or sneezes. A face shield and mask can be worn together, but most Nova Scotians are not going to be in situations that warrant wearing both.

How do you prevent glasses from fogging up while you're wearing a mask?

If your mask doesn't fit your face well, warm air is likely to escape and fog up your lenses, so it's important to get a good fit. If there's a metal strip across the nose, pinch it to fit the shape of your nose. If the straps are adjustable, use them to tighten the sides. An anti-fogging solution or even gently washing your glasses with soap and water may help. Pushing your glasses forward on your nose will allow more air to circulate. You can also try pulling your mask up over your nose and rest your glasses on top of it to block the air from escaping. If you try this, make sure your mask still fits properly over your face. Your nose and mouth should be completely covered.

If you're wearing a mask, does that mean you don't have worry about other public health measures?

No, masks need to be used as part of the package of personal protective measures: stay home if you feel unwell, wash or sanitize your hands often, use proper cough and sneeze etiquette, physically distance as much as possible, avoid touching your face, mouth, nose and eyes, limit the number of people you get together with, and clean high-touch surfaces and objects frequently.

What is the latest evidence or guidance on masks?

Our move to mandatory masking is consistent with updated guidance from the World Health Organization which supports masking as part of a multi-faceted public health approach to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. The guidance as updated in June 2020 is available at: [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak)

If I'm required to wear a mask in the workplace, who pays for it?

When an employer is requiring employees to wear a mask as a result of an order by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the employer is responsible to provide the equipment.

Who do you complain to if you see people not following this rule?

First, masks are an important part of the whole package of public health measures that help prevent the spread of COVID-19. We ask all Nova Scotians to follow the law. It's how we protect each other.

Second, if you see someone not wearing a mask, do not assume that they are breaking the rules when you don't know the facts of the situation.

If you feel it's important, you could take the issue to the owner of the public place. If the issue is not resolved, you could contact the industry/sector association if there is one to learn about what is included in their reopening plan. Lastly, you could contact the Safety Division at the Department of Labour and Advanced Education at 1-800-952-2687 or laesafetybranch@novascotia.ca .

Who does an employee complain to if customers or other employees aren't following the rule?

An employee should bring any issue about workplace safety to his or her OHS committee if there is one, or to their employer. If the issue is not resolved, they can contact the Safety Division at the Department of Labour and Advanced Education at 1-800-952-2687 or laesafetybranch@novascotia.ca .

Can my employer require proof that I have a valid medical reason for not wearing a mask? Can I be fired if I don't provide proof and come to work without a mask?

Businesses need to accommodate people with valid medical reasons for not wearing a mask. We are asking employers to take people at the word and not require proof of a medical condition. If you have talked about this with your employer and you still have concerns, you can contact the Safety Division at the Department of Labour and Advanced Education at 1-800-952-2687 or laesafetybranch@novascotia.ca .

What are the municipal transit systems that the mask requirement applies to?

- Halifax Transit
- CBRM Transit
- Kings Transit
- Bridgewater Transit
- Town of Yarmouth Transit
- Antigonish Community Transit Society
- Strait Area Transit

What are the community transit systems that the mask requirement applies to?

- Antigonish Community Transit Society
- Bay Rides
- CHAD Transit
- Colchester Transportation Cooperative Ltd
- Cumberland County Transportation Society
- East Hants Community Rider
- H.O.P.E. Dial-a-Ride
- Kings Point-To-Point Transit
- La Transport de Cheticamp
- Le Transport de Clare
- Municipality of Chester Community Wheels
- MusGo Rider
- MusGo Rider Valley-Sheet Harbour
- Queens County Transit
- Sou West Nova Transit
- Strait Area Transit
- Trans County Transportation Society

- Victoria County Transit
- West Hants Dial-a-Ride

Why not make masks mandatory on provincial ferries (Englishtown, LaHave, etc) or on ferries to and from Nova Scotia?

There are options on these ferries to stay in your car or maintain physical distance from other people. Masks are mandatory on transit ferries like the ones that cross Halifax Harbour.

Why not make masks mandatory for employers who transport workers with their own private buses or other vehicles?

We are not making masks mandatory in this setting but we do strongly recommend them. Employers may choose to require masks under a specific work protocol.

Where can I get more information about masks?

Visit the mask section of our website at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/masks/>

We are adding resources to help at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/resources/>