RESPIRATORS, MASKS & FACE COVERINGS

Q. What is the difference between a face covering, a mask and a respirator?

A face covering is typically a handmade or manufactured mask made of cotton or similar fabrics. They are used to contain and prevent the spread of fluids from the mouth or nose, in the form of respiratory droplets, to others and environmental surfaces.

A mask is a medical-grade or non-medical grade face mask (also known as a surgical or procedure mask) that does not seal tightly to the face to act as a filter to protect the wearer. They have the same purpose as a face covering, but are subject to testing and design standards to ensure they perform as intended.

A filtering facepiece respirator (N95) protects the wearer by filtering particles from the air the wearer breathes. These respirators are intended to seal tightly to the wearer's face and are subject to rigorous testing standards.

Refer to the Face Masks Quick Reference Guide for more information.

Q: Are employees required to wear masks or face coverings?

As of August 1 2020 all individuals are mandated to wear a face covering over their mouth, nose and chin, subject to the exceptions below, in all indoor public places (publicly or privately owned) and public vehicles (includes bus, LRT and vehicles for hire). This includes the public areas of all City of Edmonton owned and operated indoor spaces located in facilities, amenities, attractions and services, including transit centres and LRT platforms. City of Edmonton employees are included in this requirement, but may be able to remove their mask once they've reached work areas not accessible to the public, or where their hazard assessment has identified other, sufficient controls (e.g. use of an operator shield or the barrier at the front counter of a recreation centre).

Hazard assessments identify when face coverings, masks and respirators are required as a control measures, some examples are where employees are attending other employer work sites and masks are mandated, where respiratory hazards are present such as silica, and where there is a higher risk for COVID-19 transmission due to difficulties physical distancing and when working with vulnerable populations. Employees are expected to consult their COVID-19 hazard assessment for confirmation if they need to wear a mask and what type is required.

Q: Am I required to wear a mask in the lobby/waiting for the elevator in Chancery Hall, Century Place, Edmonton Tower, etc.

Yes. Effective August 1, 2020 City council moved the City to Level 3 on the face covering decision making model by enacting a municipal bylaw, which builds upon Level 2 requirements by making face covering use mandatory in publicly accessible areas of retail and business in addition to the areas already covered under Level 2. Level 3 applies to all areas of buildings where the public has access as of right or by express or implied invitation. The public have access to the lobby areas and the elevator of Chancery Hall, Century Place and
Edmonton Tower. Once you reach the work area on your floor please follow the masking requirements of the applicable hazard assessment.

Q: Why are DATS Operators required to wear masks while they have passengers and conventional bus Operators are not?

DATS provides door-to-door trips and often requires close physical contact with clients from vulnerable populations and cannot maintain a two-metre physical distance. As a result, masks are required in addition to other controls to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Conventional Bus Operators have bus shields which limit interactions with patrons and manage the risk of transmission of COVID-19 accordingly. As such, face masks and gloves are not required to be worn while behind the shield for conventional Bus Operators. See the COVID-19 Hazard Assessment for City Operations for more information.

Q. Will wearing a face covering prevent me from getting COVID-19?

While wearing the face covering may reduce the degree to which a person touches their mouth and nose, thereby reducing risk of transmission, it is mainly intended to help contain the droplets that might be emitted from the wearer during a cough or sneeze. A face covering must always be used in conjunction with proper handwashing and soiled mask handling, disposal or cleaning practices to effectively reduce the risk of getting COVID-19 and other respiratory based viruses.

Q. Where can I get face coverings?

Cloth face coverings will not be supplied by the City at this time. The City is working on a bulk purchase of face coverings, however, they will not be available until September. Employees are encouraged to bring them from home and wear them where face coverings are required. Non-medical masks and respirators will be supplied to employees in the same way other forms of PPE are supplied. If you are unsure how to access non medical masks or respirators, speak to your supervisor. The City also participates in Provicially led programs to distribute masks to members of the public as part of an effort to promote health guidance for face coverings among the general population.

Q. As a supervisor, what should I say to front line employees who do not want to wear cloth face coverings?

Employees working in public accessible facilities are required to wear a mask upon entry of the facility until they have entered non public accessible areas and/or their hazard assessment has identified appropriate controls are in place and a face covering is no longer required. Employees not following the face covering guidelines for their facility or job as outlined in their hazard assessment should be reminded that this is a safety requirement just like any other type of personal protective equipment (PPE) it is the responsibility of the employee to comply and the supervisor to enforce.

Exceptions include:

- Persons under the age of 2;
- Persons who are unable to place, use, or remove a face covering without assistance;
- Persons unable to wear a face covering due to a mental or physical concern or limitation, or protected ground under the **Alberta Human Rights Act**;
- Persons consuming food or drink in designated seating areas or as part of religious ceremony;
- Persons engaged in water activities or physical exercise;
- Persons providing care or assistance to a person with a disability where a face covering would hinder that caregiving or assistance; and
- Persons engaging in services that require the temporary removal of a face covering.

Q. What is the protocol for distributing respirators and/or masks for COE employees working on sites that require face coverings?

The process for requesting and obtaining PPE in any case is the same. Corporate Procurement and Supply Services (CPSS) has a process for procuring and distributing respirators and masks. The key steps in this process are:
• Supervisors are to contact their branch CPSS representative with their request for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

• Supervisors will be required to verify the reason for the request, and where masks are being requested for COE work sites, they will need to demonstrate that an appropriate hazard assessment has been completed and all other controls for COVID-19 have been considered.

• Requests are reviewed to ensure that the type of respiratory protection issued will meet the needs of the business area and consider the current supply and potential respiratory hazards.

• Once the respiratory equipment is received by the business area, supervisors are responsible for issuing them to employees and providing appropriate training on inspection, use and maintenance.

Q. Will the City provide masks for work sites where face coverings are now mandated?

Employees are encouraged to bring their own cloth face coverings to wear in situations where a face covering is required. The City will continue to provide non-medical masks and respiratory protective equipment where the hazards of the workplace require it. This includes situations where employees are unable to physically distance themselves from others and when working in publicly accessible indoor facilities and in transit vehicles and centers. For more information see appropriate COVID-19 Hazard Assessment.

If employees who work from home are occasionally attending work in a high rise office tower, they are expected to bring and wear their own face covering when travelling to work through public areas such as the lobby of City buildings. The City is working on a bulk purchase of face coverings, however, they will not be available until September.

Q. Is the City going to provide respirators/masks for employees who take transit to come to work?

The City of Edmonton has distributed the Provincially supplied masks to ETS riders. Any employee who takes transit is expected to obtain their own mask or face covering for their commute to work.

Q: Will COE employees working on other contractor sites be issued the same masks as the COE employees working on sites that require mandatory face coverings?

The City will issue masks and respirators where a face covering is mandated on a third-party site, or where the hazard assessment requires a mask after all other controls have been considered and addressed.

Q. The nature of my work prevents me from keeping a 2 m/6 feet distance from others at all times. Will I be required and/or issued a respirator/mask?

Where physical distancing can't be achieved to keep individuals 2 m/6 feet apart, the Government of Alberta requires masking to protect others who are in the area from anyone who may have COVID-19. City of Edmonton COVID-19 hazard assessments have been developed to clearly outline safety measures such as mask and face covering requirements and other controls to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission to employees and the public. The City of Edmonton created a guide to explain more on the types of masks, procedures and controls we have in place at the City.

Q. Will the City be requiring all transit riders to wear a face covering?

As of August 1, 2020 the City of Edmonton requires that all transit riders wear a mask. These have been made available to riders.

It is everyone's responsibility to follow the guidance provided by the Government of Alberta such as the need to practice physical distancing, good hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette while they move through their daily activities and to stay at home when they are sick.
In addition to masking, significant safety controls to further protect operators and the public have been implemented by Edmonton Transit Services (ETS) including:

- Service adjustments and seat signage to allow empty seats between passengers to promote physical distancing
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of all buses, LRT, DATS vehicles, transit centres, LRT stations as well as high touch areas in individual and shared workspaces using a safe disinfectant known to kill the virus
- Adjusted service so all in service buses have Operator shields
- Routes are being monitored and buses are being added on higher volume routes to allow for physical distancing
- Communication strategy to the public to remind them of self assessment, physical distancing and appropriate hygiene practices.

Q. I have an underlying health condition, will wearing a face covering affect my health?

Wearing respiratory protection of any type may have an impact on the wearer’s ability to breathe and therefore impact the amount of oxygen they are able to take-in. Any person with a pre-existing medical or health condition, including those which are respiratory based, is strongly encouraged to consult with a qualified health care professional before wearing a cloth face covering to ensure wearing the covering does not place their health or immediate safety at risk. If an exemption to the mandate to wear a face covering in a city owned and operated facility or transit vehicle applies to you then you will not be required to wear one.

City of Edmonton workers who are required to wear City-issued tight fitting respiratory protective equipment (ie. N95 or higher level respirators), are subjected to an internally administered health screening process to determine clearance for safe respirator use. Additional information on fit testing requirements and health screening during COVID-19 may be found in the OH&S Guideline for Respiratory Protective Equipment.

Q. Do face coverings replace my existing PPE?

Face coverings, masks and respirators should be used in addition to other engineering and administrative hazard controls to protect you and others from COVID-19 and other identified respiratory hazards. If a specific type of respirator is required for a job or task, wear that respirator instead of a cloth face covering as outlined in your hazard assessment or respirator code of practice. The reason for this is that respirators protect against other airborne contaminants and hazards that may be present such as silica or welding fumes that a cloth face covering does not. When that task is completed, a cloth face covering can be otherwise used.

Q. My duties require me to wear an N95 filtering facepiece respirator but I’ve heard there’s a shortage.

In order to ensure services that rely on N95 respirators continue—as well as to ensure that the health and safety of frontline first responders are protected— a number of solutions have been proposed in the OH&S Guideline for Respiratory Protective Equipment in the event of supply shortages. Depending on your identified respiratory hazards, a suitable alternative to the N95 respirator will be provided to you to allow for the same or a higher amount of respiratory protection against the identified respiratory hazards.

Q. Am I allowed to wear a face covering with political statements or logos on them?

No - while at work, you are a representative of the City of Edmonton; therefore, your face covering cannot promote political statements, logos, or statements/pictures as they may be offensive to others.

Additional Resources:

If you have a question about Face Coverings, Non-medical masks or N95 respirators that is not answered in this FAQ, please contact your business areas Safety Engagement Lead.

The City collaborated with AHS and Dr. Chris Sikora, the Edmonton Zone Medical Officer for Health, to produce an educational video that provides clarity around wearing masks and gloves. To learn more.

Watch this Face Covering and Mask video for additional information explaining more on the types of masks, procedures and controls we have in place at the City.
The Government of Alberta's Guidance for Wearing Non-medical Face Masks for the General Public