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 mask made of cotton or similar fabrics. They are used to contain and prevent the spread of fluids containing germs, 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. 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.

**Q: Are employees required to wear masks?**

At this time employees are only required to wear a mask or respirator where the hazard assessment has identified it as a control measure or where they work on other employer worksites that have mandated the use of face coverings. Unless an employee needs to attend a site where a face covering is mandated, it is their own choice whether they decide to wear a face covering.

**Q: Why are DATS Operators required to wear masks and conventional bus Operators are not?**

The Government of Alberta released new integrated guidelines for personal protective equipment and hygiene practices which recommends masks for frontline personnel who have multiple interactions with vulnerable populations and cannot maintain a two-metre physical distance. The masks are intended to protect the vulnerable person(s) being served/cared for as they are at higher risk of serious illness should they contract COVID-19.

Given that DATS provides door-to-door trips and often requires close physical contact with clients, now is the time to implement the use of masks in addition to our other controls to protect our clients from getting sick. Conventional Bus Operators have bus shields and rear door boarding in addition to the other measures to limit interactions with patrons and manage the risk of transmission to patrons accordingly. As such, face masks and gloves are not required for conventional Bus Operators at this time.

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

No. A face covering that is not tight fitting to the face and not used properly will not protect the wearer. The face covering which is intended to help contain the droplets that might be emitted from the wearer during a cough or sneeze and may actually increase the risk of the wearer and other people the wearer is in contact with, of getting COVID-19. 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. Employees who wish to wear them may bring them from home.

Q. As a supervisor, what should I say to front line employees who want to wear cloth face coverings?
A cloth face covering is not a replacement for the other preventative measures such as staying home when sick, practicing physical distancing, washing your hands, and covering coughs and sneezes.

Employees who wish to wear a cloth face covering may do so, assuming they practice proper handling and maintenance to avoid contamination and risk of exposure to themselves and others. Supervisors are asked to inform workers who choose to wear cloth face coverings of the following face covering guidelines. It is the responsibility of the worker to comply accordingly. In cases where these guidelines are not followed and the worker introduces a hazard to themselves or others (e.g. improperly handling and discarding the face covering, etc), disciplinary action may be taken.

Q. What is the protocol for distributing respirators and/or masks for COE employees working on PCL and other employer sites where face coverings are required?
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. COE employees working on PCL sites are being issued respirators/masks by the City. Will other COE employees working similar jobs be issued respirators/masks/facemasks?
PCL has mandated the use of cloth face coverings as the minimum requirement. As a reminder, face coverings are to be used in addition to the recommended measures to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 such as staying home when sick, practicing physical distancing, washing your hands, and covering coughs and sneezes. By strongly adhering to these measures, wearing respiratory protection such as an N95 filtering facepiece respirator, a medical-grade face mask (surgical/ procedure mask), or non-medical cloth face covering (either purchased or home made) to protect yourself is not needed in most cases.

The City will continue to provide respiratory protective equipment (mask and respirators) where the current hazards of the workplace require it as per the Hazard Assessment and Respiratory Code of Practice for each business area.

Q: Will COE employees working on other contractor sites be issued the same masks as the COE employees working on the PCL site?
The City will issue masks and respirators only 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?

The decision to issue an employee a mask or respirator is only made after a hazard assessment has determined that all other appropriate controls have been considered and implemented and the risk has not been sufficiently managed. For the majority of cases, a combination of diligent hand washing, cough and sneeze etiquette, surface cleaning and disinfecting, staying home when sick, practicing physical distancing wherever possible and assessing if the task is critically required will significantly reduce the risk of COVID-19. The Government of Alberta recommends that in some circumstances where individuals are interacting with members of vulnerable populations and cannot maintain a two-metre physical distance, masks are to be worn to protect the vulnerable person(s) being served/cared for. An example would be DATS where all operators will begin to wear surgical masks to protect the vulnerable individuals they are serving/caring for from getting sick.

These circumstances will be identified on the corresponding hazard assessment and communicated to affected workers. Supervisors and employees are encouraged to review the COVID-19 Hazard Assessment that pertains to their work area to ensure all other controls are in place before requesting respirators/masks.

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

No, the City of Edmonton will not be supplying respirators, masks or cloth face coverings for employees who take transit. It is everyone’s responsibility to practice physical distancing, good hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette while they move through their daily activities.

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

Not at this time. It is everyone’s responsibility 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.

To support this approach, 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 - this includes switching the community buses to 40’ buses so they could have shields
- Routes are being monitored and buses are being added on higher volume routes to allow for social distancing
- Temporary fare suspension to eliminate transfer issuance and rear door boarding to encourage further distancing from Operators and between members of the public.
- Communication strategy to the public to remind them of self assessment, social 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. City of Edmonton workers who are required to wear City-issued tight fitting respiratory protective equipment (i.e. 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 only be used in addition to other engineering and administrative hazard controls to protect you and others from COVID-19 and other identified respiratory hazards.

In addition to the other forms of PPE that protect the body, eyes, hands or feet, if your work tasks require the use of approved respiratory protective equipment, such as a filtering facepiece respirator (N95), half face, or full face respirator, you should continue to wear it as outlined by your hazard assessment and control document and Respirator Code of Practice. These respirators, if properly worn and maintained in accordance with manufacturer guidelines, will provide an adequate level of protection against COVID-19.

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.

Additional Resources:

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.

The Government of Alberta's Guidance for Wearing Non-medical Face Masks for the General Public