

Face masks

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Face masks are a way we can protect ourselves and others. Find out when you should wear one and how to wear one safely.

Why you should wear a face mask

Wearing a face mask helps prevent the spread of COVID-19 in 2 ways:

- they reduce the number of virus particles someone with a respiratory illness can spread
- they prevent you from inhaling respiratory virus particles.

Face masks protect yourself and others

Wearing a face mask also helps protect others around you, especially people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

This includes older people, people with compromised immunity and disabled people.

The best protection is when everyone wears a face mask.

Types of face masks

Different types of face masks provide different levels of protection:

- medical masks are a suitable choice for most people when worn correctly
- P2/N95 masks can offer extra protection against breathing in viruses – when worn correctly these masks will best protect people who have a higher risk of getting very sick from respiratory illnesses.

To protect everyone, you should wear a face mask that best fits you, suits your needs, and is comfortable to wear. A mask that is not worn correctly will be ineffective.

Where face masks are recommended

It is recommended you wear a face mask when visiting the following healthcare service providers:

- hospitals – including outpatient services
- hospices
- residential care facilities for older people and disabled people
- doctors' clinics
- community and iwi health providers
- pharmacies – excluding pharmacies inside supermarkets
- urgent care services, such as after-hours clinics
- ambulance services
- disability support services
- diagnostic services such as blood testing or radiology services
- dentists and oral health services
- other allied health services such as optometrists, physiotherapists, or chiropractors.

When visiting these healthcare service providers and others, such as psychotherapy, counselling, mental health and addiction services, be aware that you may be asked to wear a face mask to protect those at higher risk – respect and follow the facility's policy on mask wearing.

Healthcare providers may:

- ask you to wear a mask in particular situations or locations within a healthcare facility to protect people at higher risk of getting very sick, for example patients receiving care in an intensive care unit or emergency department of a hospital
- continue to require all staff or visitors to wear masks within their facility
- require mask wearing to comply with Health and Safety obligations.

People at higher risk

People at higher risk of getting very sick include:

- older people and kaumātua
- babies
- people living in aged residential care facilities
- unwell or sick patients in hospital
- people with other health conditions
- disabled people.

It is especially important to wear a face mask when visiting these people.

If you are sick with a respiratory illness

If you have symptoms of a respiratory illness and need to visit a healthcare provider to get medical care for yourself, wearing a well-fitting face mask can stop you spreading infectious particles to others. This protects those around you and helps to reduce their risk of being infected.

If you have COVID-19

If you have COVID-19, it is recommended you isolate for at least 5 days, even if you only have mild symptoms.

As some people are infectious for up to 10 days, after leaving your 5 days of recommended isolation, it is also recommended you wear a face mask if you:

- need to visit a healthcare facility or an aged residential care facility
- have contact with anyone at risk of getting seriously unwell with COVID-19.

Health and aged residential care facilities may continue to require all staff and visitors to wear masks, even if they have not had COVID-19 cases recently.

Visiting someone with COVID-19 in healthcare

If you are visiting someone with COVID-19, you need to be aware of the risk to yourself. You should wear a well-fitting face mask and follow the healthcare facility's visitor policy.

There are times when you should avoid visiting patients or residents of a health or aged residential care facility, such as when you:

- have symptoms of a respiratory illness including COVID-19, or another infectious illness
- have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 5 days
- are a household contact and are still within your recommended 5-day testing period.

Where face masks are encouraged

Face masks are encouraged if you are:

- a household contact and testing daily for 5 days
- at higher risk of getting seriously ill from respiratory illnesses including COVID-19
- keen to reduce your risk of becoming sick.

Face masks are also encouraged when in closed, crowded or confined spaces such as:

- public transport, including buses, commuter trains, indoors on ferries, flights, taxis and ride-shares
- crowded places
- enclosed spaces with poor ventilation
- when in close contact situations, such as face-to-face conversations.

Some places such as workplaces, special events, or marae may still ask you to wear a face mask as a condition of entry. This is their decision and no longer a government requirement.

People who may not be able to wear a face mask

Face masks are generally not recommended for:

- people who have a physical or mental health condition or disability that makes wearing a mask unsuitable
- tamariki aged 5 or under.

Tamariki aged between 6 and 11 years are encouraged to wear a mask at the discretion and supervision of their caregiver.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXbhE6URXAQ&source_ve_path=OTY3MTQ&feature=emb_imp_woyt

Video transcript: How to wear a face mask safely

Audio: Kia ora, I'm Anthony Jordan, I'm a clinical immunologist and this is how to wear a face mask safely with Unite against COVID-19.

Visual: Dr Anthony Jordan faces the camera. Words appear on screen over 3 types of face masks – "How to wear a face mask safely".

Audio: You may have a disposable surgical mask.

Visual: Dr Anthony points to a blue surgical mask. Text appears on-screen – "Surgical mask" – and an arrow points to the surgical mask.

Audio: You may have an N95 mask or you may have a disposable P2 mask.

Visual: Text appears on-screen – "N95" and "P2" – an arrow points to each mask.

Audio: Before putting on any mask, clean and dry your hands well.

Visual: Dr Anthony washes his hands in a sink and dries his hands with a paper towel. The words "wash" and "dry" appear on-screen.

Audio: Place your face mask over your face, covering your nose and mouth, securing the loops behind your ears, and pulling it down.

Visual: Dr Anthony demonstrates the actions to the camera.

Audio: It should fully cover your mouth and nose without any gaps.

Visual: The words "no gaps" appear on the screen.

Audio: When wearing your mask, avoid touching your face or the front of the mask. To remove the mask, pull the straps away from your head and then away from your face.

Visual: Dr Anthony removes the surgical mask, removing the right ear strap, followed by the left ear strap, moving the mask away from his face.

Audio: After taking off your mask, wash and dry your hands or use hand sanitiser.

Visual: Dr Anthony washes his hands in a sink and dries his hands with a paper towel.

Audio: Cloth masks can be reused by washing on a hot cycle and then drying it out completely for its next use.

Visual: A washing machine spins, with the word "wash" appearing on the screen. Unite against COVID-19 branded cloth masks hanging on a washing line with the word "dry" on screen.

Audio: Replace your mask if it's damp, dirty or damaged.

Visual: Damp, dirty and a damaged mask appear with the words written overtop.

Audio: That means disposing of your unwanted face masks safely.

Visual: A rubbish bin opens and a mask is placed inside. The words "in the bin" appear on the screen.

Audio: And that's how to wear your face mask safely with me, Dr Anthony Jordan.

Visual: Dr Anthony smiles at the camera. Unite against COVID-19 logo and graphics appear on screen.

Get free face masks

Medical masks remain free for everyone until 29 February 2024. P2/N95 masks remain free for people at higher risk of getting very sick until 30 June 2024.

You can get free face masks when you pick up free rapid antigen tests (RATs) from participating pharmacies and collection centres.

When picking up free masks, talk to the staff onsite about whether a medical or P2/N95 mask is the best choice for you.

People at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19

[\(https://web.archive.org/web/20240227230208/https://info.health.nz/conditions-treatments/infectious-diseases/covid-19/about-covid-19/\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20240227230208/https://info.health.nz/conditions-treatments/infectious-diseases/covid-19/about-covid-19/)

You do not need to be unwell or have COVID-19 symptoms to get free masks.

Find a collection site near you that offers free masks:

- [on the Healthpoint website](https://web.archive.org/web/20240227230208/https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19/?covidTesting=im%3A1374240)
(<https://web.archive.org/web/20240227230208/https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19/?covidTesting=im%3A1374240>)
- by calling [0800 222 478 \(tel:0800222478\)](tel:0800222478) and choosing option 1.