



Alameda County FAQ for the Order Requiring Residents and Workers to Wear Face Coverings *Effective on June 5, 2020*

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Note: Updates to the FAQs may be issued periodically, with the most recent updates reflected in blue text.

To control the spread of COVID-19, all residents and workers must **cover their nose and mouth** with a face covering, such as a bandana, scarf, towel, or other piece of cloth or fabric, when leaving home for any reason, including as doctor appointments, grocery shopping, pharmacy visits, and riding on public transit. Face coverings also include store-bought disposable masks, which need not be medical grade. Combined with physical distancing of at least 6 feet and frequent handwashing, face coverings reduce the chance that an infected person - who might not have symptoms - can infect others and can decrease transmission in the community overall if everyone wears them. **“Your mask protects me, and my mask protects you.”**

The Face Covering Order can be found [here](#). Violation of or failure to comply with this Order is a misdemeanor punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both.

General Questions

1. Why do I need to wear a face covering?

COVID-19 can be spread by people who are not showing symptoms, when they speak, cough, sing or sneeze. When covering the nose and mouth, face coverings reduce the release of droplets containing infectious virus particles into the air. **Social/physical distancing is not a substitute for wearing face coverings, and face coverings are not a substitute for social/physical distancing and frequent handwashing. All of these measures together are important to stop the spread of COVID-19.**



Wearing a face covering is about helping others. By covering your face when you go out for essential reasons, you are being a good neighbor and community member.

2. Does this change mean that I no longer need to follow the Alameda County Shelter in Place Order?

No! Covering your face does not change the Shelter in Place Order, which requires people to stay home as much as possible and maintain social/physical distancing of at least 6 feet. The most recent Order (from June 5th) does allow stable groups of 12 or fewer people from different households, called Social Bubbles, to socialize together outside. More information about Social Bubbles can be found [here](#).

3. What is an acceptable face covering?

A face covering can be made of cloth, fabric, or other soft or permeable material, but it should not have holes. Some options for face coverings are:

- Homemade face covering from cloth you already have
- Scarf
- Bandana
- Neck gaiter
- Tightly woven fabric, such as cotton t-shirts and some types of towels

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has [simple instructions on how to make face coverings](#), even without needing to sew. A face covering **should cover your nose and mouth** and:

- Fit **snugly but comfortably** against both sides of the face and under the chin.
- Be **secured** with ties or ear loops.
- Include **multiple layers** of fabric.
- Allow for breathing without difficulty.
- Be washable and dryable without damage or a change to its shape.

A store-bought disposable face mask or dust mask, which need not be medical grade, also qualifies as a face covering. However, these masks are not washable and are intended to be discarded after each use.

Try not to touch or adjust your face mask or covering while wearing it. There may be virus particles on the outside of the face covering, which can then get on your face and hands. If you do need to adjust your face mask or covering, use hand sanitizer before and after touching it.



Please do not purchase N-95 and surgical/medical masks. These masks are in short supply, and need to be conserved for health workers, first responders, and other workers on the front lines.

4. Can I wear a face shield *instead of* a face covering?

Face shields may reduce the spread of COVID-19, but **they should not take the place of a mask or cloth face covering** as required by the Health Officer's Order. A face covering helps protect other people in case the person wearing the mask is infected. A face shield helps protect the person wearing it from other people who may be infected. Combining a face covering with a face shield may be an even more effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. If you choose to wear a face shield, it should extend below the chin and cover the sides of the face.

5. What is *not* an acceptable for use as a face covering to protect against the spread of COVID-19?

- Any mask that has a one-way valve designed for easier breathing. This type of valve is typically a raised plastic disk about the size of a quarter on the front or side of the mask. These valves can allow infectious virus particles out of the mask, putting others nearby at risk.
- A Halloween or plastic mask.
- Any mask that obscures the wearer's eyes and/or forehead, such as a ski mask with holes for the nose or mouth or a balaclava.

6. How do I take a face covering on and off?

- Wash your hands before putting on the face covering.
- Place the face covering securely over your nose and mouth.
- Make sure to stretch it from ear to ear.
- Avoid touching your face covering once it is on your face.
- When removing your face covering, take it off from the back of the head without touching the front of the face covering.
- Wash your hands after removing the face covering.

7. How do I clean a cloth face covering?

Wash your cloth face covering after daily use. Cloth face coverings can be stored in a bag or bin until they can be washed with **hot water and dish or laundry soap/detergent**. Cloth face coverings can be placed in the dryer on a high heat cycle or



dried in the sun. Always wash your hands, or use hand sanitizer, before and after touching face coverings. Face coverings should be thrown away when they:

- Have damaged ties, straps or have stretched out.
- No longer cover the nose and mouth.
- Will not stay on the face.
- Have tears or holes in the fabric.

For more information, see [CDC guidance on how to wash cloth face coverings](#).

8. When am I *required* to wear a face covering?

Face coverings are required to be worn almost anytime you are outside your home, including when you are:

- Waiting in line to go inside a business.
- Inside a place of business, like a store or government building.
- Riding or waiting for public transportation.
- In a taxi or rideshare vehicle, even if you are the driver and are alone.
- Seeking healthcare.
- Outdoors and anticipating others may pass within 30 feet of you. This applies whether you are walking, running, biking, otherwise exercising, standing, or using a motorcycle, skateboard, moped or scooter.
- Working at a job where there are routinely other people or your job requires that you visit someone else's house or living space. For more information, see the section called *Questions for Businesses and Workers* below.
- Preparing food or other items for sale or distribution even if you are alone while doing it.

9. When am I *not required* to wear a face covering?

Face coverings are not required to be worn when you are:

- At home.
- In a car alone or solely with members of your household or living unit.
- Sitting or standing with people in your Social Bubble, such as picnicking outside, and you are more than 6 feet from other groups.
- Exercising outdoors (like walking, hiking, bicycling, or running) alone or with people in your Social Bubble and you are more than 30 feet of other people.
- Eating or drinking alone or with members of your Social Bubble either inside or outside and there are no other people within 6 feet.



10. Do I need to have a face covering or mask on me at all times?

Yes. When you are not at home, you should always have a face covering with you, and it should be visible and readily accessible, such as hanging around your neck.

11. Should I wear a face covering at home if I or a household member is sick?

You are not required to use a face covering at home. But, if you or someone at home is sick with [symptoms of COVID-19](#), you may all use face coverings in the home to reduce exposure of others to virus particles. You should contact your healthcare provider if you or someone in your home is sick.

12. Should I wear a face covering at home if a household member is vulnerable to COVID-19?

If anyone who lives with a vulnerable person is engaged in frequent activities outside the home, wearing a face covering at home may reduce the risk to the vulnerable person. A full list of populations who are vulnerable to COVID-19 and should take extra precautions is available [here](#).

13. Who is exempt from wearing face coverings?

The following groups of people are not required to wear a face covering:

- Children age 2 and under **must not** wear a face covering due to the risk of suffocation. The [State](#) is more restrictive and requires those ages 3 to 12 to also wear a face covering.
- Anyone with a physical, intellectual, or developmental disability that prevents them from wearing a mask.
- Anyone who has trouble breathing or is not able to remove a face covering without assistance.
- Anyone who is deaf and uses facial and mouth movements as part of communication.
- Persons who are obtaining a service involving the nose or face for which temporary removal of the face covering is necessary to perform the service.
- Anyone who has been advised by a medical professional not to wear a face covering. The Health Officer's Order requires a written exemption from a medical professional, based on a medical condition, health concern, or disability.
- Any worker if wearing a face covering creates a safety hazard under established health and safety guidelines. For example, a mask or face covering might create a safety hazard if it prevented you from seeing or smelling a hazard, or it risked getting caught in machinery or catching on fire.



- Anyone who is not required to wear a face covering should consider wearing a face shield. If you choose to wear a face shield, it should extend below the chin and cover the sides of the face.

14. Can a business refuse me entry and/or service if I do not wear a face covering?

Yes, you will be refused entry and/or service if you are not exempt from wearing a face covering. If you are advised by a medical professional not to wear a face covering because it poses a health risk, please be prepared to inform the employees when asked. The Health Officer's Order requires a written exemption from a medical professional, based on a medical condition, health concern, or disability.

15. How does the State Face Covering mandate interact with the Alameda County Face Covering Order? Does it supersede them?

The face covering mandate issued by the Governor is statewide, and the Alameda County Face Covering Order may be more restrictive. Where a conflict exists between this Order and any state mandates, the most restrictive provision controls.

16. When will the face covering requirement end?

The Order does not have an expiration date, and the Health Officer will continually evaluate the need for face coverings. It is expected that the requirement will continue for many months to keep the infection rate as low as possible, until better prevention and treatment options are available.

Questions for Businesses and Workers

1. How should businesses implement the Face Covering [Order](#)?

Businesses must create a [COVID-19 Site Specific Protection Plan](#) and should do so in partnership with their Human Resources and legal advisors and share it with all employees. The following guidance may be helpful:

- [OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for Covid-19](#)
- [Alameda County Small and Large Construction Project Safety Protocol \(Appendix B-1 and B-2\)](#)
- [Pandemic Preparedness in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)



- [CDC's Interim Guidance for Business and Employers](#)
- [DEFEH Employment Information on COVID-19](#)
- [California's COVID-19 Industry Guidance](#)

2. What are the requirements for businesses and workers?

Generally, businesses must ensure that their employees and other staff (e.g. contractors, volunteers, gig workers) wear a face covering:

- In any area when working with the public or in areas where customers or the public could be present.
- Whenever multiple employees are in an enclosed space unless they are all members of the same household.
- If a person shares a desk or individual office with coworkers on an alternating schedule. They do not need to wear one in a private office when others are not around.
- In a space where equipment such as tools, supplies, copiers, or computers are shared.
- When visiting someone else's house or living space to perform work.
- When preparing food or other items for sale or distribution even if you are alone while doing it.
- When operating public transportation or shared transportation.

Cloth or reusable face coverings should be laundered daily, and disposable face coverings may be discarded in standard trash receptacles.

3. Do employees in their own cubicle need to wear a face covering?

Cubicles are open spaces and employees should wear a face covering, especially while talking, including talking on the phone, and when talking to another person.

4. Do employees need to wear a face covering while physically distanced in a meeting room?

Yes, employees must wear a face covering and physically distance.

5. Is my business required to provide face coverings to my employees?

Employees should be provided with all required protective equipment, including face coverings, as necessary to enable them to comply with the Health Officer's Order while



they are working. The employer should ensure that face coverings are worn properly at all times.

6. Is my business required to inform customers that they need to wear a face covering?

Businesses must inform customers about the need to wear a face covering, including posting signs at the entrance to the store or facility. A sample sign to be used for notifying customers can be found at the Alameda County Public Health Department [website](#).

7. Can a business refuse entry and/or service if a customer is not wearing a face mask?

A business must take reasonable steps to keep people who are not wearing a face covering from entering their business. They must refuse service to anyone (other than children under 2, those with health conditions that prevent them from wearing a mask, and others who may specifically be exempted under the Order) not wearing a face covering. See the section entitled "*Who is exempt from wearing face coverings?*" above.

8. Does this Order apply to people who are working in health care settings?

No, people who are working in healthcare settings are subject to existing regulations regarding wearing specified face coverings and personal protective equipment while at work. CDC recommendations can be found [here](#).

9. Which employees and other personnel are exempt from wearing face coverings?

An employee should not be required to wear a face covering if (1) a medical professional has provided a written exemption to the face covering requirement, based on a medical condition, other health concern, or disability; or (2) if wearing a face covering while working would create a risk to the person related to their work as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

See also the section entitled "*Who is exempt from wearing face coverings?*" above.



10. What if an employee refuses to wear a face covering but does not qualify for an exemption?

Employers have the option of working with employees to identify an alternate work setting where a face covering is not required.

Additional Resources

1. [Alameda County Face Covering Order](#)
2. [California Face Covering Mandate](#)
3. [Centers for Disease Control Face Covering website on how to make, wear, and clean a face covering](#)
4. [Video on how to make a face covering by Surgeon General, Dr. Jerome Adams](#)
5. [Face covering guidance for children with special health needs](#)
6. To donate unopened N-95 respirators, surgical masks, personal protective equipment, and other supplies email: covid.donations@acgov.org
7. [Alameda County Public Health COVID-19 webpage](#)
8. [The role of community-wide wearing of face mask for control of coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) epidemic due to SARS-CoV-2](#)
9. [Moving Personal Protective Equipment into the Community: Face Shields and Containment of COVID-19](#)