



FAQs on FACE COVERINGS

Under Governor Larry Hogan's direction, state agencies continue to develop comprehensive and coordinated prevention and response plans for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The [Maryland Department of Health \(MDH\)](#) will communicate directly with the public, providing updates as this situation develops and accurate information about how to protect yourself and your family. If you have questions about COVID-19 that are not answered here, call your [local health department](#) or dial 2-1-1. For information and resources pertaining to the business community, please visit the Maryland Department of Commerce's website [here](#).

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A FACE COVERING?

Face coverings protect both the wearer and others from being infected by COVID-19 by blocking the spread of both large and small respiratory droplets containing the virus.

WHERE ARE WE NOW WITH FACE COVERINGS?

As more people get vaccinated and the State and Nation move forward in recovering from COVID-19, advice on face coverings is likely to be updated from time to time. As vaccination rates increase, new case rates decrease, and we learn more about how the virus spreads among vaccinated and unvaccinated populations in different settings, [CDC guidance](#) and the [Governor's Executive Order](#) were able to relax masking mandates, particularly for vaccinated individuals. Many individuals and businesses are trying to understand how best to help customers, neighbors, and their communities best move through this transition.

Many individuals who are fully vaccinated may still feel more comfortable wearing a face covering around others. Individuals who are not vaccinated may feel comfortable not wearing a face covering around others due to decreasing infection rates and increasing vaccination rates. It is important that businesses and organizations adopt policies that allow individuals to adapt to this changing environment without stigmatizing individuals making these choices. Employees and customers are likely to have questions about these policies and would benefit from an open discussion about how to best promote a transition to recovery.

WHEN MUST I WEAR A FACE COVERING?

There is no longer a mandatory statewide masking order in effect, this is in line with the [latest guidance](#) coming from the CDC. In alignment with this CDC guidance, face coverings will still be required on public transportation, in schools, and child care and health care settings. The Maryland Department of Health has issued a [public health advisory](#) strongly recommending that all non-vaccinated individuals over the age of 2 years continue to wear face coverings in all indoor settings and in outdoor settings where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Private businesses and workplaces can implement policies requiring face coverings to be worn on their premises. The business has the sole responsibility to uphold those policies. Local jurisdictions can also use their own emergency powers under existing authority to require face coverings.

WHAT IS A FACE COVERING?

A face covering fully covers a person's nose and mouth and is secured to the person's head. In the Governor's Executive Order, face coverings include cloth face coverings, and full-face shields **that fully cover the nose, mouth, and eyes**. Cloth face coverings are recommended by both CDC and the Maryland Department of Health to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The CDC has detailed guidance and instructions regarding homemade cloth face coverings available [here](#). This does not include material with visible holes or gaps in them like lace, knitted material, crochet, and/or mesh. Face coverings with exhalation valves should also not be used as they allow unfiltered air to escape to others. The face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that continue to be needed by healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance. However, MDH strongly recommends, but does not require, also wearing a cloth face covering, if using a face shield.

ARE FACE COVERINGS SAFE?

Yes, most adults and children are able to wear a face covering safely, even while exercising. The CDC tracks research on the efficacy and safety of face coverings, compiled in a [Science Brief on the Community Use of Cloth Masks to Control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2](#). The CDC and MDH continue to recommend the use of face coverings by unvaccinated individuals as an evidence-based strategy to prevent the transmission of COVID-19; reduce exposure to the virus by the wearer; and reduce the overall number of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths related to COVID-19.

WHO MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY WEARING FACIAL COVERINGS?

Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2 (and under the Executive Order, are not required under the age of 5), anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. Customers with disabilities who cannot wear a cloth face mask, plastic full-face shield, or other suitable face covering, shall be provided reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act ([ADA Title II and III](#)).

Customers cannot be asked invasive questions about a disability or asked to provide medical documentation or other proof of a disability. Employees or staff that cannot wear a face covering due to a disability may request reasonable accommodations in accordance with the employer's disability policies and procedures ([ADA Title I](#)). An employer's policies and procedures may require documentation to grant reasonable accommodations.

WHAT ARE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIFFICULTY WEARING FACIAL COVERINGS?

Customers with disabilities or medical conditions who are unable to wear a face covering must be provided with an opportunity to receive the same goods and services as customers without disabilities or medical conditions. Businesses should engage the customer in an interactive process to determine possible alternative methods of service that would allow the business to keep its employees and other customers safe, while still providing service/goods to the customer. This may include but is not limited to, curbside delivery, allowing pick up of goods by a representative, telephone appointments, ordering by telephone with delivery, or other innovative solutions.

For more guidance [on the ADA and face coverings](#), contact the [Mid-Atlantic ADA Center](#) or 1-800-949-4232. Employers can learn [about COVID19 and employees with disabilities](#), and [pandemic preparedness in the workplace and the ADA](#).

MAY INDIVIDUALS BE REQUIRED TO WEAR A FACE COVERING?

During the global pandemic, and in accordance with the Governor's Order, customers and staff can be required to wear a cloth face mask, plastic full-face shield, or other face covering. In [Pletcher v. Giant Eagle, Inc.](#), the Federal District Court of Western Pennsylvania determined that the face covering requirement does not violate the ADA, provided the entity ensures reasonable accommodations are available.