

## Employee Q&A: Medical Masks for COVID-19

March 11, 2021

### **Q1: What is a medical mask?**

A medical mask is a disposable-style mask that is used to protect the wearer from the potentially infectious droplets of others and contain the wearer's respiratory droplets as well. It is a medical device that is rated to an established standard for particle filtration, fluid resistance and breathability.

The medical masks that are being provided are suitable for general non-health care work environments and are certified to filter >95% of particles that attempt to pass through the mask.



### **Q2: How many layers are medical masks? What materials are medical masks made from?**

Medical masks are composed of three layers of melt-blown or nonwoven polypropylene or fabric material.

### **Q3: Why is Metrolinx requiring the use of medical masks in the workplace?**

The COVID-19 Incident Command Team (ICT) has recognized the potential impacts of the emerging COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC) that are spreading in Ontario. While research on VOCs is still ongoing, there is evidence that VOCs may be transmitted more easily between individuals and even brief contact with an infected individual can lead to transmission. Medical masks that fit well provide an enhanced and validated layer of protection and reduce the risk of transmission in the workplace when used by all employees by containing respiratory droplets more effectively than a fabric face covering.

### **Q4: How is a medical mask different than a fabric face covering?**

Medical masks are manufactured and tested to an established standard for fluid resistance, breathability, and filtration efficiency and provide droplet splash protection to the wearer. Fabric face coverings are not manufactured or tested to a standard and primarily provide protection to others, whereas medical masks protect both the wearer and others.

### **Q5: How many medical masks can I expect to use per day?**

It is estimated that most employees will use approximately two (2) medical masks per day depending on their level of exertion in their daily duties and/or work environment. Medical

masks may be put on again after removal to eat or drink or when seated at a dedicated workspace (per the Mandatory Mask Policy).

**Q6: When should I replace a medical mask?**

Medical masks should be replaced when they become damp, dirty, torn, loose, or hard to breathe through. Medical masks should be disposed of in a garbage receptacle.

**Q7: Why is Metrolinx requiring the use of medical masks in the workplace?**

The COVID-19 Incident Command Team (ICT) has recognized the potential impacts of the emerging COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC) that are spreading in Ontario. While research on VOCs is still ongoing, there is evidence that VOCs may be transmitted more easily between individuals and even brief contact with an infected individual can lead to transmission. Medical masks that fit well provide an enhanced and validated layer of protection and reduce the risk of transmission in the workplace when used by all employees by containing respiratory droplets more effectively than a fabric face covering.

**Q8: Does this requirement apply to all Metrolinx employees or just front-line staff?**

This new requirement applies to all Metrolinx employees, integrated contractors, and visitors. All Metrolinx employees, integrated contractors and visitors must wear a medical mask when present on Metrolinx property, subject only to the exceptions set out in the Mandatory Mask Policy. Face coverings must specifically be worn in offices, common areas, operational areas, facilities, meeting rooms, revenue vehicles, non-revenue vehicles, stations, and when outdoors.

**Q9: Does this requirement apply to contractors?**

Yes, the requirement to wear medical masks in the workplace applies to contractors in Metrolinx facilities and assets, as stated in the [Metrolinx Mandatory Mask Policy](#).

**Q10: Does this requirement apply to visitors?**

Yes, the requirement to wear a medical mask also applies to visitors in Metrolinx facilities. Metrolinx contacts should advise their visitors ahead of time of the new requirement to wear a medical mask when attending Metrolinx property or facilities. A limited quantity of medical masks may be made available at the entrances to facilities for visitors to wear but where possible visitors should provide their own medical masks.

**Q11: How long will this requirement be in place?**

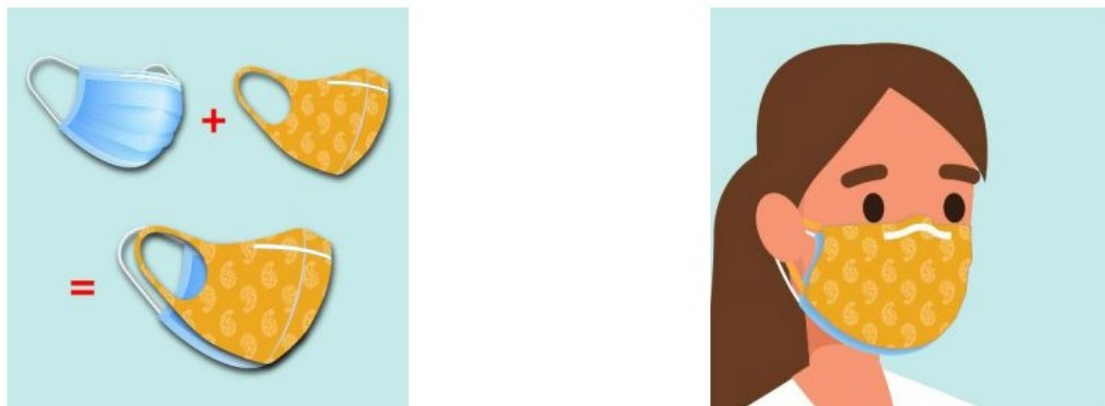
The requirement to wear a medical mask in the workplace will be in place until lifted by the COVID-19 ICT once the risk of COVID-19 transmission is sufficiently low in the community that fabric face coverings alone may be considered.

**Q12: Can I wear a fabric face covering over a medical mask (double-masking?)**

Yes, double-masking is recommended to obtain a better fit when using a medical mask but is not required at this time. Wearing a second mask on top of a first mask (to create a double mask) can:

- **Improve fit:** by pressing the inner mask closer to the face, thereby reducing the amount of air that leaks around the edges of the masks.
- **Improve filtration:** by adding more layers of material to reduce the number of respiratory droplets containing the virus that come through the masks.

A recent [study](#) conducted in a laboratory found that this double mask combination provided much better protection to the wearer and to others as compared with a cloth mask by itself or a medical mask by itself. Other ways to enhance the fit of a medical mask include knotting the ear loops to shorten them and create a tighter fit or tucking in the sides of a medical mask if they are loose.



**Q13: I found a model of medical mask that I find more comfortable - can I wear them instead of the ones Metrolinx is providing?**

Yes, employees may wear their own medical masks if they meet ASTM Level 1 or higher requirements for medical masks and are rated under *ASTM F2100 Standard Specification for Performance of Materials Used in Medical Face Masks*. If you are unsure if your personal mask meets this criterion, please contact [coronavirus@metrolinx.com](mailto:coronavirus@metrolinx.com).

**Q14: I'm a people leader of a non front-line business unit - how can I acquire medical masks?**

If you require medical masks for a non front-line business unit (i.e. a team that is regularly able to work remotely), please email [coronavirus@metrolinx.com](mailto:coronavirus@metrolinx.com) with the following information:

- Number of boxes of medical masks required (medical masks come in boxes of 50)
- Drop-off location (building, floor, or address)
- Delivery contact name and contact information
- Requested delivery date

The distribution point for non front-line business units is through the mailrooms in the downtown core. Medical masks will be distributed using internal couriers. Masks will also be available for pick-up from the mailroom upon request by contacting [coronavirus@metrolinx.com](mailto:coronavirus@metrolinx.com). Please provide enough notice ahead of time to receive your medical masks.

**Q.15: I'm running low on medical masks - where can I get more?**

The supply of medical masks for front-line business units will be coordinated through our COVID-19 Incident Command Team (ICT) with regular re-supply being provided to these business units moving forward. If you require additional medical masks, or you are running low on medical masks, please reach out to [coronavirus@metrolinx.com](mailto:coronavirus@metrolinx.com) to coordinate delivery of additional masks.

**Q16: I already wear a medical mask and eye protection (face shield or goggles) when I'm performing customer-facing duties - how does this change impact me?**

Some staff in direct customer-facing roles have already been issued a medical mask and eye protection for situations where they are required to come within 2 metres of an unmasked or improperly masked individual. This requirement is still in place.

**Q17: Does this requirement for medical masks apply to customers as well?**

No, the requirement for medical masks does not apply to customers. Face coverings are still mandatory for customers on Metrolinx property or when on-board our services.

**Q18: Isn't it wasteful to be using disposable masks? Are there re-usable medical masks available?**

While medical masks are disposable, their use at Metrolinx is seen as a key enhancement to our control strategy for COVID-19 and will not be a permanent measure. At this time, there are no re-usable medical masks available, but manufacturers are working on developing re-usable medical-grade masks and the COVID-19 ICT will look to move to re-usable models when they become available.