

**From:** [Brian Coffey](#)  
**To:** Out of [@parliament.govt.nz](#)  
**Cc:** [ODI \(MSD\)](#); [Ken Bowater](#); [i\\_request \(MSD\)](#); Out of scope; [Shona Jones](#)  
**Subject:** RE: URGENT: Media query masks  
**Date:** Friday, 28 January 2022 12:40:52 pm

---

Kia ora Out of

Some highlighted suggestions/changes and as an fyi best not to use the term “able bodied”, non-disabled is the preferred language by disabled people.

Nga mihi

Brian

“Mask wearing is an important part of keeping people safe during this pandemic. However, one of those communities who find the wide spread wearing of masks difficult is the deaf and hard of hearing community. The Government recognises that lip reading is an important way for them to communicate and navigate their daily lives.

On the 27 January 2022 the Ministry of Health updated their guidance on face coverings and exemptions. This advice can be found here <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-masks-and-face-coverings-community>

The advice states that if you are someone who relies on New Zealand Sign Language and/or reading people's facial expressions, including lip-reading, or need to communicate with someone who does, you can remove your mask or face covering to communicate, but you should maintain a physical distance of two metres.

If you are non-disabled and need to remove your mask to communicate with a person who is deaf, hard of hearing or who is deafblind, you can if you feel safe to do so and you should maintain physical distancing. This will be greatly appreciated by the Deaf/hard of hearing person.

The Ministry of Health, the COVID All of Government website, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), the Office for Disability Issues and non-government organisations such as Deaf Aotearoa all have some advice on their websites on these issues and are working hard to increase awareness of these guidelines. The most comprehensive and recent advice is on the Ministry of Health website.

My advice to everyone is that mask requirements are there for everybody's safety. However, there will be situations which require understanding from all involved in order to ensure safety is not compromised, and those who are deaf or hard of hearing are able to navigate their daily lives as easily as possible.”

---

**From:** Brian Coffey [Out of scope]

**Sent:** Friday, 28 January 2022 12:06 PM

**To:** [Out of scope] <[Out of scope]@parliament.govt.nz>

**Cc:** ODI (MSD) <[Office\\_for\\_Disability\\_Issues@msd.govt.nz](mailto:Office_for_Disability_Issues@msd.govt.nz)>; Ken Bowater

[Out of scope] request (MSD) [Out of scope]; [Out of scope]

[Out of scope]; Shona Jones [Out of scope]

**Subject:** RE: URGENT: Media query masks

Kia ora [Out of scope]

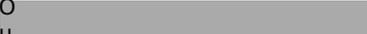
Just as I sent you the response I also received the following information on <https://covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/keep-up-healthy-habits/wear-a-face-mask/who-does-not-need-to-wear-a-face-mask> I have adjusted the advice accordingly...

RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT

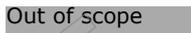
---

**From:** Brian Coffey

**Sent:** Friday, 28 January 2022 11:53 AM

**To:**  [@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:>@parliament.govt.nz)

**Cc:** ODI (MSD) <[Office\\_for\\_Disability\\_Issues@msd.govt.nz](mailto:Office_for_Disability_Issues@msd.govt.nz)>; Ken Bowater

; i\_request (MSD) ; 

 Shona Jones 

**Subject:** FW: URGENT: Media query masks

Kia ora  – Please find below the advice requested.

Please note that Deaf Aotearoa has also received media queries and so with the Office's approval it may be useful to share the proposed response with Deaf Aotearoa..

Nga mihi

Brian

**Information to inform the Minister's response to a media query on face masks and advice to non-disabled people communicating with Deaf people and those who are hard of hearing**

- The use of face masks remains and becomes an increasingly important public health measure to reduce the transmission of the COVID virus including the Omnicron virus
- There are some people for whom mask wearing is not possible because of medical and other conditions - we continue to ask that New Zealanders respect the needs of those who genuinely are unable to use face masks.
- We do want to ensure disabled people and others are able to access services and participate in the community and do so safely when mask wearing is not possible.
- This requires understanding from all involved - non disabled people and disabled people, to ensure safety is not compromised.
- For those New Zealanders who are deaf or hard of hearing and for whom visual facial cues such as lip reading enable effective communication there may be the need for a mask to be removed or lowered to talk. The ongoing advice has been that when this occurs social distancing (the two metre rule) should be maintained.
- While many Deaf and hard of hearing people are aware of this advice one of the frustrations for many of those people is that others in the community are not aware of the advice and this creates some tension. We welcome the opportunity for this guidance and important information is known by all New Zealanders.

- On the 27 January 2022 the Ministry of Health updated their guidance on face coverings and exemptions. This advice can be found here <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-masks-and-face-coverings-community>.
- The advice on the Ministry of Health advice website is:

*"In situations where wearing a mask is a legal requirement, you can remove your mask for short periods of time for the following reasons:*

- *if you are someone who relies on New Zealand Sign Language and/or reading people's facial expressions, including lip reading, or need to communicate with someone who does, you can remove your mask or face covering to communicate, but you must maintain a physical distance of two metres*

*"If you need to remove your mask to communicate with a person who is deaf, hard of hearing or who is deafblind, you can. In a residential care setting you should discuss your requirements, and the requirements of staff and other residents, with the service provider before your visit."*

- This advice is consistent with the advice provided by Deaf Aotearoa on their website.
- The Covid 19 website provides similar advice on <https://covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/keep-up-healthy-habits/wear-a-face-mask/who-does-not-need-to-wear-a-face-mask>
- You also do not need to wear a face mask if *"you need to communicate with someone who is deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or has a disability which makes it hard to have effective communication"*

## **Attachments**

- Ministry of Health in full
- Covid 19 all of government website advice
- Deaf Aotearoa Advice

## **The Ministry of Health Advice in full**

# **COVID-19: Use of masks and**

# face coverings in the community

Information on the use of masks and face coverings in the community including how they can help protect you.

---

*Last updated: 27 January 2022*

## On this page:

- [Using a mask can help protect yourself and others against COVID-19](#)
- [Types of face masks](#)
- [How to use a mask safely](#)
- [Temporary removal of a mask](#)
- [Face mask exemption advice](#)
- [At-risk people](#)

## See also:

- [How to use a face mask safely](#)
- [Unite Against COVID-19 website](#)

---

## Using a mask can help protect yourself and others against COVID-19

The Delta and Omicron COVID-19 variants are highly transmissible, so we need to use a range of measures and tools to protect us from infection.

Wearing masks is an important tool that can be used to help minimise the direct spread of the virus in infected particles and droplets. This occurs when an infected person speaks, laughs, coughs, sneezes or breathes (read more on [how COVID-19 spreads](#)).

For effective protection, it is essential that any mask used is well-fitting, used correctly, worn consistently and according to guidelines and instructions for their use. Find the mask that best fits to cover your nose, mouth, and chin without gaps above, below or on the sides.

Face masks are just one of the measures we can use for reducing the spread of COVID-19. Other measures include, being fully vaccinated (and having a booster when able), staying home if you're sick, seeking medical advice if you are unwell or need a COVID-19 test, keeping your distance from other people, cleaning your hands often, sneezing and coughing into your elbow, opening windows for ventilation and keeping track of where you've been with the NZ COVID Tracer app.

For some people wearing a face mask is unsuitable due to a disability or health condition. See [Face coverings exemption advice](#)

See [Personal Protective Equipment use in health and disability care settings](#) for detailed guidance on the appropriate use of PPE by health care and support workers at all settings.

For further guidance on face coverings under the COVID-19 Protection Framework visit the [Unite](#)

## Types of face masks

### Reusable masks (non-medical) – fabric, washable

Re-usable fabric masks are often made from material that can be washed and dried and re-used. The effectiveness of fabric/cloth masks is highly variable and depends on the style and materials used.

Re-usable masks should consist of several layers – three as a recommended level. This is because masks with more than one layer will help contain your respiratory droplets and other people's respiratory droplets getting in. The material used is important to ensure it is suitable for breathing in, filtration and providing a good fit. Protection is increased by using an additional 'filter layer' in the middle and a nose bridge wire to help mould the mask to your face.

These masks can be purchased through a variety of retail outlets, online or, you [can make your own](#) (Unite Against COVID-19 website).

Taking care of a reusable mask is important. The Ministry of Health recommends you should have enough (washable) face masks so each person in your family can wear one and wash one. Check for 'wear and tear', making sure there are no holes, no thinning out of the material and the ties or elastic loops to keep the mask in place are still in good condition.

### Disposable masks – non-medical masks, medical masks and particulate respirators

#### Non-medical single use masks

Non-medical single use masks look similar to a medical mask but may not be certified to medical mask standards. They can be purchased from retail stores such as supermarkets or pharmacies. You may also be able to access disposable masks through relevant social services agencies or organisations in your community.

#### Medical masks

A certified well-fitting medical mask offers a good level of protection. They are designed for single use by health care workers and must comply to specific standards within New Zealand – e.g., AS 4381:2015 or, an international equivalent standard to ensure they meet a suitable barrier rating for use in health care.

#### N95/P2 particulate respirators

P2/N95 particulate respirator masks are a single use mask designed to filter out small airborne particles. They are used by health care staff who undertake specific clinical procedures that increase the risk of infection or looking after people who have infections that are transmitted by airborne infectious particles. Staff working in specific high-risk areas such as the border also wear these masks.

Particulate respirator masks range in model, price, availability and suitability. These masks work best when a person is 'fit tested' to the style or make of the respirator which enables a tight seal against the wearer's face. It is important that wearer's follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to put the mask on correctly to ensure you have moulded it correctly to your face so there are no gaps. This is

called a 'user seal check', and how to remove and dispose of them safely.

Currently the Ministry of Health supply these types of masks to frontline staff at the border and in health care settings who are at greater risk of being exposed COVID-19.

## **\*Dust masks/masks that have exhalation valves are not recommended**

Dust masks or masks that have exhalation valves are not recommended as they have a one-way valve, which allows viral droplets to escape if an infected person coughs or sneezes.

---

## **How to use a face mask safely**

When wearing a mask, whether it's one you purchase or made yourself, you need to know how to use it correctly and safely.

This includes how to fit the mask to your face, how you put it on, what not to do whilst wearing it, how to take it off and dispose of it safely after use, to avoid the risk of contaminating your hands. Any mask you use should be changed at least every four hours or earlier when it becomes damp or dirty. Medical masks and P2/N95 particulate respirators are designed to be discarded after use – follow manufacturer's instructions for information on your mask.

Remember to practice good hand hygiene either through washing and drying your hands or using hand sanitiser when putting on and after removing your mask.

## **How to improve the fit of your mask**

There are some techniques you can use to improve the fit of your mask:

- use masks that have a 'nose bridge wire' included – this helps mould the mask across the bridge of your nose
- if wearing a medical mask, the coloured side (usually blue) faces outward, and the pleats point downward.
- tuck excess material from your face mask to reduce any gaps around the side of your face.
- use a mask brace or ear loop clip to tighten your mask against your face to prevent air leakage.
- increase the number of layers in your mask. If you are making your own mask include three layers.
- wear a disposable medical mask underneath your fabric mask (wearing two disposable medical masks will not improve fit).
- consider shaving or trimming facial hair to achieve a better level of fit.

For further guidance visit [how to use a face mask safely](#) and the [Unite Against COVID-19](#) website.

See more information on [how to use medical masks and P2/N95 particulate respirators](#).

## **Resources/information**

- [Improve how your mask protects you](#) (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention)
  - [COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control Living guideline: mask use in community settings. 22 December 2021](#) (World Health Organization)
-

# Temporary removal of a mask

There are times when you may need to remove your mask temporarily while you are outside your household bubble.

Remember to wash or sanitise your hands before removing your mask and putting it back on.

In situations where wearing a mask is a legal requirement, you can remove your mask for short periods of time for the following reasons:

- if you are someone who relies on New Zealand Sign Language and/or reading people's facial expressions, including lip reading, or need to communicate with someone who does, you can remove your mask or face covering to communicate, but you must maintain a physical distance of two metres
- if wearing a mask or face covering in the workplace would create a risk to your health and safety, as determined through Health and Safety guidelines
- in indoor environments where the mask or face covering is likely to get wet
- when consuming food, drink or medication
- as requested by medical or oral health professionals
- in any situation where wearing a mask or face covering may provide a choking hazard, such as changing clothes
- if it is raining and you cannot prevent your mask or face covering from getting wet.

## Face masks for deafblind people

We understand some people who have a disability or health condition may not be able to wear a face mask safely or comfortably, and that wearing a face covering is unsuitable in some circumstances due to the need for lipreading.

In general, you should wear a face covering whenever you can. The Delta and Omicron variant is more transmissible and face mask are one way we can protect ourselves and each other. Where possible you must maintain a physical distance of at least one metre when you cannot wear a face mask.

If you need to remove your mask to communicate with a person who is deaf, hard of hearing or who is deafblind, you can. In a residential care setting you should discuss your requirements, and the requirements of staff and other residents, with the service provider before your visit.

---

## Face mask exemption advice

While it is currently mandatory for people aged 12 and over to wear a face mask when taking public transport or going into businesses, this does not apply to people with a physical or sensory disability, mental health or other health condition that makes wearing a face mask unsuitable.

Some people for whom wearing a face mask is unsuitable may have an exemption card that they are able to show; but having an exemption card is not a legal requirement and people who are exempt from wearing a face covering are not obliged to show an exemption card.

People for whom a face mask is unsuitable need to be able to access businesses and services just like everyone else. Businesses and others need to ensure they do not discriminate against people who are exempt from wearing a face covering.

If you are exempt, you can enter businesses. You should not worry if a business owner or employee approaches you to ask whether you are able to wear a face covering. They are just ensuring your

safety and the safety of others.

Businesses who have concerns about whether someone is being dishonest may choose to involve the Police. People who refuse to wear a face covering and falsely claim to be exempt from wearing a face covering when they are not, could be liable for an infringement fee of \$1,000; or up to \$4,000 if the matter goes to court.

Read more information for [people who are unable to wear a face covering](#) and for [businesses](#).

---

## At-risk people

People at higher risk of COVID-19 are advised to avoid being in crowded, poorly ventilated indoor spaces with people they don't know, particularly if they have not been vaccinated.

If you need to go out, and feel you are vulnerable, you may wish to discuss with your health provider whether using a medical mask is best for you.

See [COVID-19: Advice for higher risk people](#) for information about who is considered to be at higher risk and on how to help keep yourself safe from COVID-19.

### In this section

- [COVID-19 - Advice for people who are unable to wear a face covering](#)

---

We know face coverings are unsuitable for some people due to a disability or health condition. An exemption card has been developed that you can show to transport operators, retailers and service providers. [Read more](#)

- [COVID-19: How to use a face mask safely](#)

If you choose to wear a face mask – one you purchase or make yourself – you need to know how to use it safely. This includes how you put it on, what to do while wearing it, how to take it off and how to handle it safely after use to avoid the risk of infection. [Read more](#)

## **COVID 19 All of Government website**

The following information on <https://covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/keep-up-healthy-habits/wear-a-face-mask/who-does-not-need-to-wear-a-face-mask> |

The relevant section is:

### **You also do not need to wear face mask if:**

- it is unsafe, for example if wearing one means a driver cannot safely operate the vehicle
- there is an emergency
- you have a physical or mental health illness or condition or disability that makes wearing a face mask unsuitable
- you need to prove your identity
- you need to communicate with someone who is deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or

has a disability which makes it hard to have effective communication

- you need to take medicine
- you need to eat or drink, if eating or drinking is usually allowed
- it is not required by law.

-

## **Deaf Aotearoa website advice**

### **Updated advice on wearing masks**

The Ministry of Health has updated its advice on wearing masks, this is as a part of our ongoing response to COVID-19.

We have seen in other countries that masks can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 when there are cases of the virus being transmitted through communities (community transmission).

We should all prepare now to use masks before there may be a need to use them.

### **Advice for Deaf people and using masks**

If you are someone who relies on New Zealand Sign Language, or visual facial cues such as lip reading, or are needing to communicate with someone who does, you can remove your mask to talk, but you must maintain a physical distance of 2 metres.

Where it is not possible to wear a mask and you have been told or encouraged to wear a mask, please maintain a physical distance of 2 metres.

If you wear a hearing aid, you need to be careful when putting on or taking off your face mask to make sure you don't lose your hearing aid or get it tangled in the mask ties or loops.

RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT