

Masks and Visitors for Congregate Living Settings Q and A



Congregate Housing - a type of housing in which each person or family has their own bedroom or living area but shares with others a dining room, recreational room, kitchen or other living space. Examples include: shelters, group homes, rooming houses, and supportive housing.

Does the City of Ottawa's Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law apply to congregate housing?

The Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law was amended on August 26, 2020 to include the enclosed common areas of condominium or multi-unit residential buildings. This means that any congregate housing that is not Provincially regulated, such as rooming houses, would be subject to the mask requirement in the common areas. Congregate housing that is Provincially regulated, such as group homes, would not be covered by the by-law as they are regulated under other legislation.

Should staff working in congregate settings wear masks?

Yes, Ottawa Public Health recommends staff working in any congregate setting to wear a medical (surgical/procedure) mask since it reduces the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, the *Re-opening Ontario Act* (ROA) requires employees of a business or organization to wear masks unless in an area that is not accessible to the public and where a distance of two metres (6 feet) from every other person can be maintained while in the indoor area.



Non-outbreak setting:

Staff should wear a medical masks at all times as recommended by the Ministry of Health, except:

- when eating (when staff should stay 2 metres/ 6 feet from others) or when alone in a private space.

Outbreak setting:

Staff should wear a medical (surgical/procedure) mask (in some cases with a face shield).

For more information, please see the [Public Health Ontario Document](#) for for wearing masks in congregate settings. Staff should also:

- Wash their hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth unless they have just washed their hands.
- Cover their cough and sneeze with a tissue or into their arm, not their hand.
- Stay home if they are sick. Use the [OPH sick note](#), if needed.
- Follow [Public Health Ontario guidance](#) to keep workplaces clean and hygienic – increase the frequency of cleaning high-touch surfaces such as elevator buttons, door knobs keyboards, mouse, phones, desks, computers, seating areas, lunch tables, kitchens, washrooms, etc.



Do tenants, clients or visitors in congregate housing need to wear masks?

Yes, the Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law requires that masks be worn while in the common areas of multi-unit residential buildings, which includes congregate housing. Masks would therefore be worn in lobbies, elevators, dining and recreational areas, where it may be harder to keep a 2 metre (6 foot) physical distance from others. Residents are required to wear masks when they come and go from the facility. Residents should know that the Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law does apply and is also enforceable in enclosed public spaces outside of the congregate housing setting.

If the facility is not in an outbreak, residents who are well should be provided with either a cloth or medical mask. In an outbreak, all residents should be provided a medical mask and non-essential and designated visitors will not be allowed to enter during the outbreak. Please see [Visitor’s Guidelines](#) for more information.

Residents who are sick should be provided with a medical mask (surgical/procedure), an appropriate medical assessment, and possibly be tested for COVID-19. If tested for COVID-19, a resident must self-isolate while waiting for test results. For more information, visit Ottawa Public Health [Self-Isolation](#) page.

All visitors (essential, designated and non-essential) must wear a face covering (non-medical mask or cloth mask) at all times during the visit inside or outside the site and maintain proper respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene. Non-essential visitors are responsible for bringing their own face covering (non-medical/cloth mask) for visits. In the event that a site experiences an outbreak, all non-essential and designated visits must end.

The Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law also requires that hand sanitizer (alcohol-based hand rub) be available at all entrances of the premises in addition to signage being posted at every entrance notifying of the mask requirement. It is also recommended by OPH that hand hygiene stations be available in spaces that are shared such as dining areas.

Who is exempt from the Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law in enclosed public spaces?

As per [Section 2 of the By-law](#), the following are exempt:

- a) a child who is younger than two (2) years of age, or a child who is under the age of five (5) years of age chronologically or developmentally and who refuses to wear a mask and cannot be persuaded to do so by their caregiver;
- b) a person with a medical condition, including breathing or cognitive difficulties, or a disability, that prevents them from safely wearing a mask;
- c) a person who is unable to put on or remove their mask without the assistance of another person;



- d) a person who needs to temporarily remove their mask while in the Enclosed Public Space, Designated Unenclosed Public Space, or Enclosed Common Area of a Condominium or Multi-Unit Residential Building for the purposes of:
1. receiving services that require the removal of their mask;
 2. actively engaging in an athletic or fitness activity including water-based activities which includes lifeguards working at indoor pools;
 3. consuming food or drink; or
 4. an emergency or medical purpose.



No person shall be required to provide proof of any of the exemptions set out above

A person who is employed by or is an agent of the Operator of an Enclosed Public Space is not obligated to wear a Mask under this by-law while:

1. in an area of the premises that is not designated for public access, or
2. when located either within or behind a physical barrier, including but not limited to a plexiglass barrier.

Where can we get free masks?

The City of Ottawa's Human Needs Task Force and local businesses, are working together to improve mask access. If you live in Ottawa, and do not have the means to purchase a mask, you can call 3-1-1 or email the Human Needs Task Force (HNTF@ottawa.ca) to find out how to get one.

Additional Resources

- Dr. Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health for Ottawa Public Health, July 7, 2020, [Letter of Instructions for every Operator of an Enclosed Public Space within the City of Ottawa.](#)
- [Information about masks](#)
- [Information for employees](#)
- [Guidance for providers of services for people experiencing homelessness \(in the context of COVID-19\)](#)
- [Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law](#)
- [Re-opening Ontario Act – mask requirement for public spaces, workplaces, and vehicles that operate as part of a business or organization \(including taxis and ride share\)](#)

Information from Public Health Ontario (PHO)

- [COVID-19 Resources for Congregate Living Settings](#)

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

- [Visitor's Guidelines 2.0: Re-Opening of Congregate Living Settings, October 2020](#)