



# Interim Public Health Guidance: Recommendation for the wearing of medical masks indoors within dwelling for First Nations living on-reserve

Activation Date: February 22, 2021

## Accountability:

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## Preamble:

Emerging international evidence on COVID-19 variants of concern, particularly the B.1.1.7 variant, also known as the UK variant, demonstrates increased transmissibility and is associated with increased hospitalization and death compared to infection with non-variants of concern viruses.<sup>1</sup> The risk of death remains relatively low.

Indigenous peoples continue to be disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and face unique circumstances living on-reserve that lead to negative health outcomes. Factors such as overcrowded and poorly ventilated dwellings limit the ability to properly adhere to public health measures, such as physical distancing. In circumstances where probable/confirmed cases are residing with multiple individuals, these factors heighten the risk of COVID-19.

This interim public health guidance is being issued given the increased transmissibility of variants of concern and the existing factors that contribute to the disproportionate risk of COVID-19 to Indigenous peoples living on-reserve.

## Recommendation:

- It is recommended that medical masks be worn indoors where individuals are living in overcrowded and poorly ventilated dwellings when a person with probable/confirmed COVID-19 is co-habiting, particularly in the context of the public health threat of more transmissible variants of concern (VOC).

## Definitions:

- Mask is defined by the Public Health Agency as:  
A barrier to prevent droplets from an infected source from contaminating the skin and mucous membranes of the nose and mouth of the wearer, or to trap droplets expelled by the wearer, depending on the intended use. The mask should be durable enough so that it will function effectively for the duration of the given activity.
- Medical masks protect individuals from the transfer of:
  - Bodily fluids

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<sup>1</sup> New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG). The New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) advises the government on the threat posed by new and emerging respiratory viruses. Government of the United Kingdom 2021.

- Micro-organisms
- Particulate material
- Non-medical masks can be homemade or purchased and should meet the following criteria outlined by the Public Health Agency of Canada:
  - Be made of multiple layers, including
  - At least 2 layers of tightly woven fabric, such as cotton and
  - A third middle layer of filter-type fabric, such as non-woven polypropylene
  - Use materials that are breathable
- This interim public health guidance is intended to guide health care providers within on-reserve First Nations communities to recommend the implementation of this interim public health guidance.

**Guidelines for implementing this interim public health recommendation:**

- This interim public health guidance is intended to protect individuals living in the same residence with someone, who meet any of the criteria below:
  - Have returned from outside of Canada in the past 14 days
  - Have been in close contact (with or without PPE) with a confirmed case of COVID-19 either at work or at home within the past 14 days
  - Symptomatic, under investigation
  - Tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days
- This interim public health guidance is of particular importance within overcrowded and/or poorly ventilated dwellings, which can be of high prevalence within on-reserve First Nations communities.
- Other recommendations:
  - When made aware of a probable/confirmed COVID case, health care professionals should recommend self-isolation. The dwelling should be provided with an adequate supply of medical masks.
  - Communities may also reach out to their respective Indigenous Services Canada Regional Office to receive medical masks, if not provided by the province/territory, or if the community is not able to procure medical masks to implement this medical directive.

**Contraindications to the implementation of this interim public health recommendation:**

This medical directive cannot/is not recommended to be implemented in the following instances:

- Masks aren't recommended for:
  - people who live with illnesses or disabilities that make it difficult to put on or take off a mask without assistance
  - those who have difficulty breathing
  - children under the age of 2

- Between the ages of 2 and 5, children may be able to wear a mask if supervised. This will depend on their ability to tolerate it as well as put it on and take it off.
- Individuals should talk to their health care provider if they feel they cannot wear a mask safely.

**Communication Guidelines/Considerations**

- Guidance and more information on medical masks can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/medical-devices/personal-protective-equipment/medical-masks-respirators.html>
- When medical masks are not available, non-medical masks should be used. Information on non-medical masks can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>
- Additionally, each province and territory will have respective guidance on masking in public.