



**Face Mask Advisory Order
Frequently Asked Questions, 4.1.2021**

On April 1, 2021, Pierce County Public Health issued an advisory order requiring the use of face masks in public, indoor places. A copy of the advisory order can be found [here](#). The purpose of this advisory is to communicate the importance of wearing face masks in public while vaccine distribution is limited and/or community transmission remains substantial.

Why are face masks required?

COVID-19 is still prevalent in Pierce County. Pierce County has a higher rate of newly identified cases than the state average. Outbreaks are still occurring. Schools are still being impacted daily by cases and exclusion of close contacts.

Additionally, new strains of the SARS-CoV-2 have been identified in the region. Early evidence suggests these strains may be more infectious, associated with higher death rates and/or able to neutralize antibodies from previous infections. It is important that we prevent these new strains from becoming widespread in the local population.

Three vaccines are currently available, but supply is limited. It will take several months to receive enough vaccines to dispense vaccines to Pierce County's adult residents.

There is now both observational and epidemiological evidence that masks do work to slow the spread of COVID-19. Below is a list of the most recent research regarding mask wearing effectiveness and the effectiveness of mask mandates.

- CDC Scientific Brief: [Community Use of Cloth Masks to Control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2](#)
- CDC: [The Science of Masking to Control COVID-19](#)
- Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America: [An evidence review of face masks against COVID-19](#)
- Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology: [Local, state and federal face mask mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

When do I need to wear a face mask?

You need to wear a face mask whenever you are indoors, other than a private residence, and other people you do not live with are present in the same room. For example, you must wear a face covering while you are shopping in a store or in a conference room with coworkers. The federal government also requires use of a mask while using public transportation.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html>

I'm vaccinated against COVID-19. Do I still have to wear a mask?

You do still have to wear a mask in public when in the same room as people not of your household. This is important because it is possible for vaccinated people to transmit the virus to others. Until more people are vaccinated and the level of disease in our community decreases, it is important for vaccinated people to continue masking in public. The CDC guidance allows fully vaccinated people to forgo masks in *private* settings in certain situations:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

What does Pierce County consider a face mask?

"Face mask" means a piece of cloth or other material that is worn to cover the nose and mouth completely. A "face mask" includes but is not limited to a cloth face mask, a disposable or paper mask, a neck gaiter, or a religious face mask. A "face mask" does not include face shields, mesh masks, masks with holes or openings, or masks with vents. Medical grade N95 masks should be reserved for healthcare workers.

Pierce County Public Health encourages residents to wear masks that have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric, completely cover the mouth and nose, and fit snugly against the sides of the face. More tightly woven (i.e., higher thread count) fabrics provide better source control and protection, but fabrics that make it hard to breathe (e.g., vinyl) should not be worn. CDC provides suggestions for face mask selection [here](#).

Should I wear an N95?

N95s should be reserved for healthcare workers, as supply of these masks is not unlimited. However, surgical masks may be a good alternative to a cloth mask. Regardless of the type of mask used, a close fit and multiple layers are important factors.

Do I need to wear a face mask indoors, even if I can physically distance from other people at all times?

Yes, if you are in the same room as someone else not of your household. Physical distancing is important, but does not provide complete protection.

Do I need to wear a face mask when I exercise or compete in sports?

It depends on where you are exercising or competing. You do not need to wear a face mask if you are in a private residence or outdoors. For example, you do not need to wear a face mask if you are riding your bike on a trail. But you do need to wear a face mask if you are exercising indoors and other people are present, such as a gym, a cycling studio, or hotel workout room. People swimming in an indoor pool, performing tumbling, doing gymnastics on an apparatus or engaging in wrestling contact do not need to wear a mask due to safety concerns, but should

immediately put the mask back on as soon as the activity is concluded (such as moving to the sidelines or exiting the pool area).

I have a medical condition that prevents me from wearing a face mask. Do I need documentation to prove that I don't need to wear a face mask in public?

No. You are not required to carry documentation to prove that you do not need to wear a face covering in public.

I need assistance obtaining a mask. Where can I get one?

Pierce County Public Health has a modest supply of masks for people who are unable to obtain one. Please call 715-273-6755.

Can I wear a face shield instead of a face mask?

No. According to CDC guidelines, a face shield does not provide the same protections as a face covering. You are free to wear a face shield in addition to a face covering. But a face shield cannot be used in place of a face mask that would otherwise be required by this advisory order.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html#face-shields>

There may be situations where a face shield can be used instead of a face mask if you are engaging in work where wearing a face mask would create a risk to you, as determined by government safety guidelines (for example, OSHA guidelines may permit certain food manufacturing facility workers to wear a face shield instead of a face covering), or if you are engaging in activities where federal or state law or regulations prohibit wearing a face mask.

I wear glasses or safety glasses and they fog up when I wear face coverings. Do I still have to wear a face mask?

Yes, unless an exception applies. Wearing glasses is not an exception to the face covering advisory order. Anti-fog sprays and treatments are available online, along with other tips on how to prevent fogged glasses.

Many industries and jobs already require the use of eye protection and a face covering, including but not limited to paint spraying, grinding of metal, concrete sawing and grinding, and some medical or veterinary procedures.

You do not need to wear a face mask if wearing a face mask while working would create a risk to the individual, as determined by government safety guidelines, such as OSHA guidelines or regulations, or if federal or state law or regulations prohibit wearing a face mask.

Are face masks required inside of businesses and office spaces?

Yes, unless an exception applies.

Do I need to wear a face mask when using public transportation?

The federal government requires masks to be worn on public transportation.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html>

I own a business and we have our own face mask policy. Does our policy still apply?

Yes, as long your policy is *more* restrictive and not less restrictive than the advisory.

How will the face mask advisory order be enforced?

We believe that the majority of Pierce County residents will continue to wear masks as they have been. For intentional and repeated violations of this advisory order, the Pierce County Public Health Department and/or local law enforcement may investigate and Pierce County Public Health may issue a directive to a specific facility or person.

Violations may be reported to Pierce County Public Health by filling out this form:

<https://forms.gle/TCVUtucjfNmAgRz9>.

Why did you select June 4th as the end date?

June 4th is the last day of the school year for most K-12 schools in Pierce County. Masks are a proven intervention to prevent outbreaks in schools.

What do I do if I see someone not wearing a face mask, even though they should be?

Nothing. Some people have conditions or circumstances that would make wearing a face mask difficult or dangerous. Just wear your face mask and stay six feet away.