

Ministry of Health

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March 25, 2020

MEMORANDUM TO: Employers – Non-Health Care

FROM: Dr. David Williams
Chief Medical Officer of Health
Ministry of Health

SUBJECT: Use of Masks for COVID-19

The ministry has fielded a number of inquiries in recent weeks regarding personal protective equipment and interest in guidance from the ministry for the protection of staff in non-health sector settings. The focus in particular has been our advice regarding masks.

We have been working closely with Public Health Ontario (PHO), who has been monitoring the scientific evidence since the emergence of the COVID-19 outbreak and has extensive expertise in this area. Their advice and [evidence](#) on this matter is clear: COVID-19 is a droplet/contact spread virus.

Based on the evidence, the ministry has issued a legally-binding directive from the Chief Medical Officer of Health under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* to all health care settings. This directive specifies that surgical masks are to be worn by health workers for most patient care circumstances. The exception is for aerosol generating medical procedures (AGMPs) – a defined group of medical procedures performed on patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, where N95 respirators (a specific type of mask) are appropriate.

As per routine practices in health care, there are a number of controls that may be appropriate in certain circumstances, based on a risk assessment at each workplace. I would recommend the following be considered as measures that could be put in place before resorting to personal protective equipment in settings outside of health care:

- providing services virtually where possible or curtailing non-essential services;
- engineering controls, where operationally feasible (like plexiglass windows and barriers); and
- administrative controls (passive and active screening).

Only once these controls have been put in place would personal protective equipment be used, if necessary.

I continue to recommend physical distancing practices, wherever possible. Hand washing should be practiced at all times.

Mask use is generally not recommended for non-health workers. However, based on a risk assessment at each workplace setting, a surgical mask may be appropriate in circumstances where a worker may experience exposure (close contact within 2 meters) to potentially symptomatic persons. With the proper controls in place and the appropriate awareness, the use of masks in non-healthcare settings should be limited. Where warranted, mask usage should be subject to specific circumstances as informed by a work and/or workplace specific risk assessment

I particularly recommend that non-health workers do not wear N95 respirators, which are appropriate for a health care context involving AGMPs.

The ministry will continue to be available to provide any further advice that may be needed to support employees and the continuity of essential operations during this outbreak.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Dr. David Williams, MD, MHSc, FRCPS
Chief Medical Officer of Health