

Elkhart County Health Department

Guidance on Wearing Face Coverings

The outbreak of a new coronavirus continues to cause the disease called COVID-19. Elkhart County is experiencing record numbers of confirmed positive cases of COVID-19. There remains no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. In order to protect Elkhart County residents and keep Elkhart County working, the Elkhart County Health Department needs your help to slow the spread of the virus. The most common way the virus spreads is through tiny airborne droplets emitted from an infected person's mouth or nose as a result of speaking, coughing, or sneezing. These infected airborne droplets are known to be transmitted from individuals that are symptomatic (already experiencing COVID-19 symptoms) or presymptomatic (will soon, but have not yet, experienced COVID-19 symptoms). Although unknown at this time, these infected airborne droplets may also be transmitted from individuals that are asymptomatic (are infected but are unlikely to show any COVID-19 symptoms). With this understanding, the Elkhart County Health Department **strongly recommends** that **every** individual living in, working in, or otherwise entering Elkhart County follow this Guidance on Wearing Face Coverings ("Guidance").

This Guidance is broken into five distinct parts:

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A. Face Covering Directive

Every individual should properly wear a face covering over their nose and mouth when they are at:

1. an indoor area open to the public, including public transportation;
2. an outdoor public area where a distance of 6 feet from individuals outside of their household cannot be maintained; or
3. a private indoor or outdoor area where a distance of 6 feet from individuals outside of their household cannot be maintained.

An adult should supervise use of face coverings by children aged 3 to 12 to avoid misuse. A properly worn face covering is one that fully covers the individual's mouth and nose, fits snugly against the sides of the face with no gaps, is secured (i.e. straps, ear loops) to prevent slipping, and allows for breathing with no restriction. All face coverings, which are not disposed of after each use, should be washed each day it is used and made completely dry before the next use.

B. Exceptions to the Face Covering Directive

The Elkhart County Health Department recognizes that the following individuals do not need to wear a face covering:

1. any child aged two years or less (a face covering may cause such a child to suffocate);
2. any individual who has a physical disability that prevents easily wearing or removing a face covering;
3. any individual who is deaf and needs to remove the face covering to use facial and mouth movements as a part of their communication;
4. any individual who has been advised by medical professional that wearing a face covering may pose a risk to the person wearing the mask for health related reasons;
5. any individual who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance; and
6. any individual who (1) is not in an area open to the public and (2) can maintain at least 6 feet from all other individuals not residing in his or her household.

C. Intent and Use of this Guidance

The intent of this Guidance is to ensure that all people in Elkhart County, whether engaged in work activities, social activities, or everyday activities, recognize the important role a face covering can have in preventing the spread of COVID-19. This Guidance is issued based on evidence of increasing occurrences of COVID-19 within Elkhart County and our awareness that individuals in Elkhart County currently do not often wear face coverings in public. We believe this Guidance is necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19 throughout Elkhart County. When applying this Guidance, it is important to remember the following:

1. Nothing in this Guidance reduces or eliminates the requirements imposed by the Executive Orders of Governor Holcomb, or imposed by any directive or order from the local health officer, Governor, or other regulatory local, state, or federal agency.
2. Actions that contradict this Guidance do not create grounds for residents or law enforcement to stop, detain, issue a citation, arrest, intimidate, or harass individuals that do not comply with this Guidance. This Guidance may and should be used to educate, encourage, and persuade individuals to wear face coverings.
3. Use of a face covering does not replace the need to take the additional necessary protective measures set forth in Section D below.

This Guidance is issued based on scientific evidence and best practices regarding the most effective approaches to slow the transmission of communicable diseases generally and COVID-19 specifically. As public health experts continue to learn about COVID-19, this Guidance may be amended. This Guidance will expire upon a written declaration by the Local Health Officer that there is no longer a need for face coverings as a result of COVID-19.

D. Additional Necessary Protective Measures

Use of a face covering does not replace the need for all Elkhart County employers, residents, and visitors to take additional necessary protective measures to protect against the spread of COVID-19. To keep Elkhart County working, activities open, and ourselves healthy, everyone should maintain the following basic protective measures:

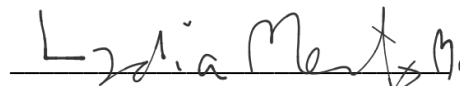
1. Wash your hands frequently during the day for 20 seconds with soap and water. If this is not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
2. Maintain a minimum of 6 feet of distance between yourself and individuals outside of your household.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
4. Stay home and isolate yourself from other members of your household if you are sick.
5. Avoid being around sick people.
6. Clean frequently touched surfaces often.
7. Sneeze and cough in the inside of your elbow or in a tissue.

Failure to maintain these additional necessary protective measures will only serve to increase the risk of spreading COVID-19

E. Frequently Asked Questions

Throughout this state-declared public health emergency, the Elkhart County Health Department has maintained a COVID-19 hotline (877-826-0011). This Guidance is accompanied by a list of Frequently Asked Questions related to face coverings to address many of the questions previously received by the Elkhart County Health Department.

Signed and issued June 12, 2020, in Elkhart County, Indiana.



Dr. Lydia Mertz, Elkhart County
Local Health Officer