

Mandatory mask use in health care settings

From 20 July 2021, all people in health care settings must wear a mask (covering mouth and nose) at all times.

The Emergency Management (Activities—General) (COVID-19) Direction 2021 includes details around mandatory mask use in health care settings.

Who is required to wear a mask?

All people in health care settings are required to wear a mask. This includes:

- > care providers
- > patients (except a person who is an in-patient at a health care service)
- > clients
- > administrative and other staff
- > employees
- > visitors
- > students
- > contractors and
- > any other person present on site.

Where are masks mandatory?

Masks are mandatory in health care settings. This includes:

- > health care
- > residential care
- > disability support or
- > aged care services.

What is considered a 'health care service'?

Health care services include the following:

- > private and public hospitals
- > general practice
- > private and public medical specialist services and practices
- > private and public mental health services and practices including drug and alcohol services
- > private and public allied health services, including those provided by a counsellor, speech pathologist, sonographer, social worker, rehabilitation counsellor, radiation therapist, radiographer, psychologist, prosthetist / orthotist, podiatrist, physiotherapist, music therapist, osteopath, orthoptist, optometrist, occupational therapist, genetic counsellor, exercise physiologist, dietitian, counsellor, chiropractor, audiologist, art/creative art therapist, or Bowen therapist
- > private complementary and alternative therapy services and practices including Chinese medicine practitioners
- > community health services including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services

Mandatory mask use in health care settings

- > private and public dental services
- > private and public reproductive services and sexual health services including termination of pregnancy
- > private and public radiology services including screening services
- > private and public disability and rehabilitation services.

What is considered a 'residential care service'?

Residential care services include the following:

- > residential disability services
- > supported residential facilities
- > residential care facilities established under the *Family and Community Services Act 1972* or licensed under the *Child and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*

Why are masks mandatory in these settings?

Wearing a mask protects people by providing an additional physical barrier to COVID-19.

What are the exceptions for mandatory mask use in health care settings?

There are some exceptions to mandatory mask use in health care settings. This includes:

- > a patient or client and/or a person providing care is not required to wear a mask if, in the provider or carer's professional opinion, or in the opinion of the service organisation providing the service, the wearing of a mask will hinder the provision of the relevant care and/or impact patient or client safety.
 - o Hospital inpatients are generally not expected to wear masks except when being transported through public spaces.
 - o A person receiving individual care in their own home is not expected to wear a mask.
 - o A person will be considered to be in the physical presence of another person if they are in the same room as that other person.
- > a person is not required to wear a mask if they have a relevant medical condition, including problems with their breathing, a serious condition of the face, a disability or a mental health condition
- > circumstances where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication, such as to enable communication by or with any person who is deaf or hard of hearing
- > a patient or client under the age of 12 is not required to wear a mask
- > a resident or live-in staff member of a residential care facility is not required to wear a mask, including in circumstances in which it is not possible to comply with the physical distancing principle.

Can a reusable cloth mask be used in health care settings?

No. Staff must wear a single use surgical mask in health care settings. The use of additional personal protective equipment (PPE) should be considered in accordance with existing infection control and PPE protocols and guidelines.

How long can a single-use surgical mask be worn?

A single-use surgical mask should be changed at least every four hours, or if it is compromised (for example, damp or damaged). Consider timing meal or bathroom breaks with mask changes.

Mandatory mask use in health care settings

When can masks be removed?

Masks can be removed when eating and drinking. Remember to consider people and maintain physical distance.

Masks must also be removed when sleeping.

Are masks mandatory in public?

Yes. From 20 July 2021, masks must be worn in public places.

There are some exceptions to these requirements, including:

- > if they have a relevant medical condition, including problems with their breathing, a serious condition of the face, a disability or a mental health condition (evidence of a relevant medical condition must be produced on request)
- > in circumstances where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication, such as to enable communication by or with any patron who is deaf or hard of hearing
- > in circumstances where removal of the mask is lawfully required for identification purposes
- > when the person is eating or drinking
- > when a person is undertaking outdoor exercise (other than walking)
- > if the person is a child under 12 years of age
- > if the person is carrying out functions as an authorised worker and it is not possible to properly carry out those functions with a mask on.

How should a mask be put on correctly?

- > Wash and dry (or sanitise) your hands.
- > Take your clean, unused mask by the ear loops or strings.
- > Put them over your ears or tie them behind your head.
- > Make sure your mask is completely covering your nose, mouth and chin.

Remember do not to touch or adjust the front of your mask while wearing it – it's the part that's protecting you from COVID-19. If you do touch it by accident, wash or sanitise your hands right away.

How should a mask be removed correctly?

- > Wash and dry (or sanitise) your hands.
- > Do not touch the front of your mask while removing it. Use only the ear loops or strings.
- > When disposing single-use surgical face masks, place in a bag or lined bin. Do not put masks into the recycling bin.
- > Wash and dry (or sanitise) your hands.

How should masks be disposed of?

Responsibly dispose of single-use surgical masks in the bin when you are finished with it. Do not put in the recycling. More information in relation to waste management can be found on the SA Health [website](#).

COVID-19 FAQs

Mandatory mask use in health care settings

How should employees handle waste bins with masks in them?

- > Wash hands using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub after emptying any waste bins.
- > Don't touch face eyes nose or mouth during tasks.
- > Bins must be lined with a disposable plastic bag liner, liners must not be reused.
- > Don't overfill bins and never compress contents by hand.
- > Tie off the bin liner when it is two thirds full.
- > Wear disposable gloves when handling sealed waste bags.
- > Wear eye protection if there is a risk of splash or spray while performing a task.

More information

- > SA Health [website](#).
- > SA Health [Infection control and personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) advice.
- > Australian Government Department of Health [website](#).

For more information

SA COVID-19 Information line 1800 253 787
sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID-19
covid-19.sa.gov.au

Department for Health and Wellbeing
SA Health, Government of South Australia

