



April 8, 2020

HEALTH ADVISORY: COVID-19 AND THE USE OF CLOTH FACE COVERINGS

New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) continues to study and respond to the spread and effects of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes the COVID-19 disease.

Recent studies have shown that a significant portion of individuals infected with the virus are asymptomatic. Asymptomatic individuals, even if they eventually develop symptoms, can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people in close proximity — for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing — even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms at the time.

Considering this new evidence, NYSDOH supports members of the public who choose to wear cloth face coverings in public settings, where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies), **especially** in areas of significant community transmission.

It is important to emphasize that maintaining social distancing, by staying at least 6 feet apart when in public and staying home whenever possible, is critical to slow the spread of the virus, even if wearing a face covering. While cloth face coverings may not prevent the wearer from becoming infected, they might help slow spread from people who have the virus and are unaware.

Cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low-cost, can be used as an additional, voluntary public health measure, beyond the recommended social distancing. Surgical masks and N-95 respirators are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other first responders.

When wearing cloth face coverings, New Yorkers should:

- Make sure that they fit snugly and cover their nose and mouth.
- Be changed frequently and laundered when they are soiled or wet.
- Not become complacent with other protective measures.
 - Do not touch the cloth covering or face.
 - Continue to be vigilant with thorough and frequent hand washing.
 - Soap and water, or alcohol-based hand sanitizer of 60%+ alcohol.
 - Practice respiratory etiquette and cover your coughs or sneezes.
 - Practice social distancing – even when wearing masks.
 - Stay home and help flatten the curve!

Visit NYSDOH COVID-19 webpage for more information at: <https://www.ny.gov/coronavirus>.



April 8, 2020

TO: Local Health Departments (LHDs)
FROM: New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH)

**HEALTH ADVISORY: COVID-19 UPDATE FOR
LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT (LHD) CONTACT INVESTIGATIONS**

BACKGROUND

Widespread, ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is occurring in some areas of New York State, while other areas have minimal to moderate levels of transmission. Aggressive containment measures in areas of minimal to moderate transmission can help minimize further spread.

CONTACT INVESTIGATION UPDATES

It is now believed that up to 25% of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 is caused by pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic transmission. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently issued revised guidance recommending that public health agencies change the beginning of the exposure risk period in COVID-19 contact investigations from “onset of symptoms” to “48 hours before symptom onset.” As a result, NYSDOH is now recommending that LHDs identify contacts to a confirmed or suspect case, who had exposure up to 48 hours prior to symptom onset.

Similarly, new data are emerging that suggests that a percentage of individuals infected with SARS-CoV-2 will remain asymptomatic. When learning of asymptomatic positive cases of COVID-19, LHDs should conduct contact investigations, with the period of exposure risk beginning at 48 hours before the specimen collection date of a positive molecular-based SARS-CoV-2 test.

In the community setting, the definition of close contact with COVID-19 cases, for purposes of contact investigations and potential movement restrictions such as quarantine, includes, but is not limited to:

- Sharing the same household;
- Direct physical contact;
- Direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g. being coughed on, touching used paper tissues with a bare hand); or
- Being within 6 feet of a case for 10 minutes or more (e.g. room, car).
 - LHDs should consider other factors such as proximity of contact, duration of exposure (e.g. longer exposure time likely increases exposure risk), and whether the individual has symptoms (e.g. coughing likely increases exposure risk), when deciding whether an exposure resulted in close contact.

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