

Frequently Asked Questions Jefferson County Face Covering Order



Why are face coverings required?

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has determined that a significant number of people who are infected with the novel coronavirus virus (COVID-19) are not showing symptoms. These individuals can spread the virus to others through speaking, coughing, and sneezing. The widespread use of cloth coverings can slow the spread of the virus by reducing the instance of the virus being spread by people who do not even know that they have the virus. The primary role of the cloth face covering is to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air.

How well do cloth face coverings work to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Remember, cloth face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing, washing hands, or staying home when ill, but they are helpful when combined with other primary interventions. According to the CDC and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, there is good evidence that the use of cloth face coverings helps reduce the spread of COVID-19.

What guidance do you have for using a face covering?

It is important to keep your nose and mouth covered. Lowering the covering from your nose and mouth while talking defeats the purpose of wearing the face-covering since you can spread the virus while talking. If you must adjust your mask, you should wash your hands before and after doing so or use a sanitizing gel or wipe before and after.

What does it mean to wear a face covering?

A face covering is a mask or cloth face covering that covers your nose and mouth. The face covering should allow for breathing without restriction. There is no requirement to wear a hospital-grade mask or other specific type or brand of face covering. You may wear a homemade face covering, if it fits closely and covers your nose and mouth. For more specific information on how to make or care for your face covering, visit the Jefferson County Department of Health website at www.jcdh.org.

Who is required to wear a face covering?

The Jefferson County Health Officer's Order requires any person over 8 years of age to wear a face covering when in an indoor public space, or while using transportation services available to the general public. It does not require people to wear face coverings outdoors, except in outdoor spaces open to the general public where ten or more persons are gathered and unable to maintain a distance of 6 feet or more between persons not from the same household. Exceptions may be made for individuals with medical conditions or disabilities that prevent them from safely wearing a face covering. For more information, refer to the questions on reasonable accommodations. There are other exceptions listed in the order.

Do I have to wear a face covering even if I am not sick?

Yes. If you are in a public space, you are required to wear a face covering even if you do not have symptoms or feel sick. People with COVID-19 sometimes do not have a fever, cough, or other COVID-19 symptoms, but can unknowingly spread the virus to others. Wearing a face covering is meant to protect other people in case you are infected.

Does my child need to wear a face covering?

Children under 2 years of age should not wear face coverings, as it may be unsafe for them. Children over 8 years of age are required to wear a face covering just as adults are, unless they have a medical condition or disability that prevents them from safely wearing a face covering (such as respiratory, heart, or sensory issues). Parents, guardians, or caregivers of children ages 3 – 8 shall exercise their own discretion regarding the ability of those children to effectively wear a face covering.

Can a store or establishment turn me away if I do not have a face covering?

Yes. A store or establishment can prohibit you from entering the building if you do not have a face covering. However, if you have a medical condition or disability that prevents you from safely wearing a face covering, you should speak with a store employee about a reasonable accommodation to help you obtain the services you need without endangering your health or the health of other shoppers. For more information, refer to the questions on reasonable accommodations.

Am I required to wear a face covering if I have already had COVID-19?

Yes. Even if you have already had COVID-19, you still may be contagious or can pass the virus to others. It is also unknown whether people who have had COVID-19 in the past can be re-infected at a later date.

Does this order apply in the City of Birmingham while its order is still in effect?

No. This Health Officer order does not apply in the City of Birmingham while its pre-existing ordinance remains in effect. However, if the City of Birmingham ordinance expires, then this order will then apply to the City of Birmingham along with the rest of Jefferson County.

Exceptions and Reasonable Accommodations

Can establishments require that I remove my face covering in order to check my identity?

Yes. There are certain circumstances when you may be required by an establishment to temporarily remove your face covering for the purpose of checking identification, such as if you are purchasing alcohol, cannabis, or certain medicines. If you are asked to remove your face covering in order to check identification, you should stand behind a partition, when present, or at least 6 feet away from other people and remove your face covering carefully and without touching your face or the inside of the face covering. You may ask the establishments for hand sanitizer before removing your face covering.

What if I have a medical condition or disability that prevents me from wearing a face covering?

If you have a medical condition or disability that prevents you from safely wearing a face covering, you cannot be required to wear one. However, if you cannot wear one, you will need to request a reasonable accommodation and take extra precautions to protect yourself and others from contracting COVID-19. For more information, refer to the questions on reasonable accommodations.

What is a reasonable accommodation?

Establishments reserve the right to refuse service to persons unable to comply with the requirement to wear a face covering, but they are required to provide a reasonable accommodation if it does not cause an undue hardship. Establishments are encouraged to inform customers there are exceptions to the requirement that all individuals must wear a mask. Individuals should either contact the establishments to request an accommodation ahead of their visit or do so upon arrival.

The individual and establishments should discuss a reasonable accommodation that will not cause the establishments an undue hardship or endanger other individuals. Some examples of accommodations that may be reasonable and not cause undue hardship are:

- ▶ Provide the individual an opportunity to order by telephone or online and provide pickup at a special register, curbside, or deliver to the individual's home.
- ▶ Arrange for an employee to bring the items for purchase to the individual and allow payment at a special register, over the phone, or at the front of the store.
- ▶ Provide the individual with the opportunity to leave a list of items with the establishments and pick them up later or arrange for delivery to the individual's home.
- ▶ Provide the individual with an opportunity to shop during off-peak times where social distancing can be maintained.

What if an establishment refuses to consider my request for a reasonable accommodation?

If an establishment refuses to consider your request for a reasonable accommodation, you should report the incident to the Alabama Department of Human Resources (Civil Rights Division) by calling 1-800-548-2547.

Do I have to prove I have a medical condition or disability that prevents me from wearing a face covering?

No. Proof of a medical condition or disability is not required. It is enough to communicate that you have a medical condition or disability that prevents you from safely wearing a face covering. You should speak to the establishments about how your medical condition or disability can be accommodated, for example, through shopping at off-peak times or using delivery services. For more information, refer to the questions on reasonable accommodations.

What other exceptions are there to the order?

There are several other situations where face coverings are not legally required by the Health Officer order, although they may still be recommended. These exceptions are listed in paragraph 3 of the order. There are also exceptions for schools, child-care establishments, as well as business areas not open to the public in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the order.