



# Face Coverings



14 August 2020

## Introduction

There is a global outbreak of COVID-19 (the “**Coronavirus**”). New Zealand has a four-level alert system to manage and minimise the risk of Coronavirus. Each alert level provides public health, social measures and guidance for businesses.

## Face coverings

Face coverings can include a paper or disposable mask, a cloth mask, a neck gaiter, scarf or bandana. In New Zealand, what face covering may be required will depend on the risk assessment of the work being done and any current or future public health requirements.

## The current situation

There is currently no mandatory requirement to wear face coverings, other than in very specific circumstances (eg. at the border) but their use is highly recommended .

In addition, Ministry of Health guidelines state that wearing a face mask can reduce the risk of infected people spreading COVID-19, and that face masks are particularly useful if there is known community transmission, and people are in close proximity to each other such as on public transport, in shops or in other confined or crowded environments.

As a business you should identify what personal protective equipment (PPE) is required in order to control any risks associated with your line of work, including infection control. You may therefore decide that face coverings must be used in your business for you to be able to safely operate.

Be aware of any changes to alert levels. The Government have indicated that they may impose further restrictions which could include mandatory face covering use.

## What are my obligations?

Remember that your health and safety obligations also extend to other people on your premises. Your PPE policy should take into account anyone onsite including employees, customers or independent contractors.

When you are identifying and purchasing the appropriate type of face covering to be used, be aware

that some respiratory equipment in circulation may not be compliant with New Zealand standards.

Ensure that any face coverings to be used as PPE will be compliant and fit for purpose. WorkSafe has further guidance in relation to this.

## Do I have to provide face coverings?

If you have identified PPE as being necessary, you will need to provide any items of PPE such as face masks to your employees and ensure any workers (such as independent contractors) or visitors know and adhere to any requirements as well. As part of a business continuity plan, you should source and have face coverings available.

## Safe use

If you implement the use of face coverings in your business it is important that you are clear on safe use guidelines, as there are risks associated with incorrect use of face coverings. Make sure guidance is provided in how the face coverings need to be used. The Ministry of Health have released guidance in how to safely put on, wear, remove and dispose of or clean face masks.

## What if an employee refuses to wear a face covering?

Discuss with the employee the reason for their refusal. You may need to consider making exceptions or finding an alternative solution (eg physical barriers) in some circumstances, such as where an employee is not able to wear a face covering due to a physical or mental health illness or condition.

If there are no reasonable circumstances or you have found out the reason for the refusal and resolved the employee's concerns as much as possible; there may be grounds to take disciplinary action against the employee. Contact the Advice Team for specific advice where this occurs.

## Further Information

This guidance note provides a brief overview of the main issues. If you believe any of these may impact on your business, please get in touch with EmploySure.