To control the spread of COVID-19, the Alameda County Health Officer issued an order on April 17, 2020 for all residents and workers to wear face coverings when conducting essential business and when around others outside of their immediate household. Combined with physical distancing and frequent handwashing, face coverings may reduce the risk of infection posed by people who are infected and without symptoms.

We recommend you do not purchase N-95 and surgical/medical masks. These masks are in short supply, and need to be conserved for health workers, first responders, and other workers on the frontlines.

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**General Questions about the Order**

1. **What does the Order do?**
   The Alameda County Public Health Department, in coordination with other Bay Area Health departments, is requiring residents to cover their nose and mouth with a face covering, such as a bandana, scarf, towel, or other piece of cloth or fabric, when leaving home in many situations. These include doctor appointments, grocery shopping, pharmacy visits, and riding on public transit, among others.


2. **When does this take effect in Alameda County?**
   It goes into effect on April 17, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. There is a grace period until Wednesday, April 22, 2020 at 8:00 a.m. to allow everyone the time to understand the requirements and come into compliance. Violation of or failure to comply with this Order is a misdemeanor punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both.
3. **Why is this a requirement?**
   As COVID-19 can be spread by people who are not showing symptoms, cloth face coverings, when combined with physical distancing and hand washing, may prevent the spread of the virus to others when going outside for essential activities. Cloth face coverings must cover the nose and mouth.

   Covering your face is about helping others. By covering your face when you go out for essential reasons, you’re not only complying with a public health order, you are being a good neighbor and community member.

4. **When will the face covering requirement end?**
   The face covering order does not have an expiration date. The Health Officer will evaluate the continuing need for a face covering, but it is expected that the requirement will continue for months in order to keep the infection rate as low as possible until better prevention and treatment options are available.

5. **Does this change mean that I no longer need to comply with the Alameda County Shelter in Place Order?**
   No. Covering your face does not change the Shelter in Place Order, which requires people to stay home as much as possible and maintain social/physical distancing.

   Cloth face coverings, when combined with social/physical distancing and handwashing, may prevent transmission of coronavirus by reducing respirator droplets.

   Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for social/physical distancing and frequent handwashing.


6. **Information and Resources**
   *Alameda County Face Covering Order*

   *Centers for Disease Control Face Covering website on how to make, wear, and clean a face covering*
Video on how to make a face covering by Surgeon General, Dr. Jerome Adams
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPx1yqvJgf4

Face covering guidance for children with special health needs
https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/Cloth-Face-Coverings-for-Children-During-COVID-19.aspx

To donate unopened N-95, surgical masks, personal protective equipment, and other supplies email: covid.donations@acgov.org

Alameda County Public Health COVID-19 webpage

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**General Questions for Residents**

1. **What is a face covering?**
   A face covering is any fabric or cloth that covers the nose, mouth, and surrounding areas of the lower face.

2. **What types of face coverings should I not wear?**
   A face covering can be made of cloth, fabric, or other soft or permeable material, but it should not have holes.
   - Any mask that has a one-way valve designed to facilitate easier exhaling – including an N95 or equivalent mask with such a valve – does not qualify as a face covering under this order and should not be used. These valves are typically a raised plastic disk about the size of a quarter on the front or side of the mask. Valves of that type allow moisture droplets out of the mask, putting others nearby at risk.
   - A Halloween or plastic mask does not comply with the order.
   - A ski mask with holes for the nose or mouth does not comply with the order.

3. **What if I do not have a face covering?**
   Face coverings can be made from cloth you already have. Some options are:
   - Homemade face covering
   - Scarf
   - Bandana
   - Neck gaiter
   - Tightly woven fabric, such as cotton t-shirts and some types of towels
4. **How do I wear a cloth face covering correctly?**
   Wash hands before you put on the face covering. The face covering is placed securely over the nose and mouth. Make sure to stretch it from ear to ear. Avoid touching it once it is on your face. When you return home remove the face covering by taking it off from the back of your head, avoid touching the front of the face covering and wash your hands after you have removed it from your face.

   The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for face coverings:
   - Fits snugly but comfortably against both sides of the face
   - Is secured with ties or ear loops
   - Includes multiple layers of fabric
   - Allows for breathing without restriction
   - Can be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

5. **How do I clean a face covering?**
   Wash your face covering after daily use. You may store face coverings in a bag or bin until you are able to wash with hot water and detergent. Cloth face coverings can be placed in the dryer on a high heat cycle.

   Always wash your hands, or use hand sanitizer, before and after touching your face or face coverings.

   Face coverings should be discarded when they:
   - Have damaged ties, straps or have stretched out
   - No longer cover the nose and mouth
   - Will not stay on face
   - Have tears or holes in the fabric

6. **When must I wear a face covering?**
   Face coverings are required to be worn:
   - While inside or waiting in line to enter essential businesses, like a grocery store or pharmacy
   - When seeking health care
   - When waiting for or riding on public transit, or in a taxi, ride share vehicle or private town car
   - When entering facilities allowed to operate under the Shelter in Place Order

7. **When are face coverings not required to be worn?**
   - At home
• In your car alone or solely with members of your household
• Exercising outdoors, like walking, hiking, bicycling, or running. However, people are recommended to have a face covering with them and readily accessible when exercising, even if they’re not wearing it at that moment, in case people encounter others.

8. **Should I wear a face covering at home if I or a household member is sick?**
   You are not required to use a face covering at home. But if you or someone at home is sick, you can use a face covering to reduce exposure. You should contact your healthcare provider if you or someone in your home is sick.

9. **Can grocery stores, restaurants, banks, health care facilities, pharmacies, public transportation, ride share, and other essential businesses refuse service and entry if I do not wear a face covering?**
   Yes, they will refuse service and entry if you are not wearing a face covering.
   If you are advised by a medical professional that you cannot wear a face covering because it poses a health risk, please be prepared to inform the employees when asked.

10. **Who is exempt from wearing face coverings?**
    The following categories of people are not required to wear a face covering:
    • Children 12 years old or younger. Children age 2 and under must not wear a face covering due to the risk of suffocation. Children age 3 to 12 are not required to wear a face covering, but if they do, they should be supervised by an adult. Supervision may look different based on the age and maturity of the child. For some children, having a discussion may be sufficient. For younger children, parents and caretakers should be present during use by the child. Parents and care givers should use their judgement.
    • Anyone who has trouble breathing, is incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance.
    • Anyone who has been advised by a medical professional not to wear a face covering.
    • Any worker to the extent wearing a face covering creates a safety hazard at work under established health and safety guidelines.

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**General Questions for Essential Businesses & Workers**

1. **What are the face coverings requirement for essential businesses and workers?**
   Generally, essential businesses must ensure that their employees and other staff wear a Face Covering in any area when working with the public or in areas where customers or
the public may be present, even if there are no customers or members of the public present at the time. Face Coverings are also required whenever employees and other staff are in an enclosed space with other people present, unless those others are members of the employee’s household or residence. This is to avoid the spreading of respiratory droplets in areas where customers or the public may come at some point.

2. **Is my business required to provide face coverings to my employees?**
   The Face Covering Order requires individuals to cover their nose and mouth; businesses will need to make their own decisions about whether to supply face coverings to their employees.

3. **Is my business required to inform customers they need to wear a face covering and can we refuse service?**
   Essential businesses must inform customers about the need to wear a face covering, including posting signs at the entrance to the store or facility.
   
   They also must take reasonable steps to keep people who are not wearing a face covering from entering their business; and they must refuse service to anyone (other than children under 12, those with health conditions that prevent them from wearing a mask, and others who may specifically be exempted under the Order) not wearing a face covering.

4. **Do all workers and volunteers at essential businesses need to wear a face covering while working?**
   Yes. All workers, contractors, and volunteers at essential businesses, operating public transportation, or operating other types of shared transportation must wear a face covering when at work in most settings. However, they do not need to wear one in a private office when others are not around, for example.
   
   Workers doing minimum basic operations, like security or payroll, essential infrastructure work, or government functions must wear a face covering when others are nearby or when they are in areas that the public regularly visits.

5. **Does this Order apply to employees of Healthcare Operations?**
   No, Healthcare Operations are subject to existing health regulations regarding specified face coverings and personal protective equipment.

6. **Which employees are exempted from wearing face coverings?**
   A face covering is not required to be worn by a particular individual if the person can show that wearing a Face Covering would create a risk to the person related to their work as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.