



NEWS

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For Immediate Release

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Health Officer Orders Face Coverings for Public & Workers

Redwood City – San Mateo County Health Officer Dr. Scott Morrow has issued a new order requiring members of the public and workers at essential businesses to wear face coverings outside the home for certain activities and in places of business.

The order will take effect at 11:59 p.m. on April 17, 2020 but will not be enforced until 8:00 a.m. on April 22, 2020. It will remain in effect until it is amended or superseded by the health officer.

The text of the order is [here](#).

Factory-made or improvised from ordinary household materials, face coverings are defined as any type of cloth, fabric, or other soft material that covers only the nose and mouth and surrounding areas of the lower face. Scarves, bandanas, neck gaiters, homemade coverings made from t-shirt material or other fabric and held with rubber bands are appropriate. Purchased masks may also be used but should not be medical grade, such as N95 respirators, which are in short supply and prioritized for health care workers.

The order requires members of the public to wear face coverings when they are inside or in line to enter essential businesses such as grocery stores and laundromats, when they are in hospitals, clinics, COVID-19 testing locations, dentists, and facilities providing veterinary care, and when they are waiting for or riding on public transportation, including ride shares, Caltrain, and BART.

The order requires drivers or operators of any public transportation, private car service, or ride-sharing vehicle to wear a face covering while driving regardless of whether a member of the public is present due to the need to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets in the vehicle at all times.

The order does not require a face covering while driving alone or with members of the same family or household in a vehicle not used commercially.

For businesses, the order requires employees, contractors, owners, and volunteers to wear a face covering in the workplace and off-site when they are interacting in person with the public or working in any public space, like a reception area, restroom or service counter—regardless of whether anyone from the public is present at the time. Face coverings are also required where food is prepared or packaged for sale or distribution, working in or walking through common areas such as hallways, stairways, elevators, and parking facilities, and in any room or enclosed area when other people, including co-workers, are present (except for members of the person’s own household or residence).

The order offers some points of clarity. A face covering is not required in a personal office (a single room) when others outside of that person’s household are not present as long as the public does not regularly visit the room. For example, construction workers, plumbers, bank managers, and bike repair persons are not required to wear a face covering if they alone and in a space not regularly visited by the public, but they must put on a face covering when coworkers are nearby, when serving clients and customers, and in spaces where members of the public or other coworkers are regularly present.

Wearing a face covering is recommended but not required for outdoor recreation such as walking, hiking, bicycling, or running. But social distancing requirements—including maintaining at least six feet of separation from all other people to the greatest extent possible—still hold. For outdoor activities, the order recommends carrying face coverings at all times, so that they can be readily worn in situations when six-foot distancing is impossible, such as when passing on a narrow path.

Runners and cyclists should avoid being directly in front of or behind another runner or cyclist who is not in the same household.

Any child aged two years or less must not wear a face covering at any time because of the risk of suffocation. The order does not require that any child aged twelve years or less wear a face covering.

With exceptions for medical conditions and workplace safety guidelines, the order notes that failure to comply with any of its provisions constitutes an imminent threat and immediate menace to public health, constitutes a public nuisance, and is punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both.

Citing the 797 confirmed cases of infection by the COVID-19 virus in San Mateo County and the increasing number of suspected cases of community transmission, the order is intended to slow the rate of spread of COVID-19. As of April 17, the Bay Area has 5,956 positive cases, including 192 deaths.

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