

Important Member Communication[View this email in your browser](#)**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Guidance for BCGEU members interacting with the public during COVID-19**

Many BCGEU members are wondering what kind of personal protective equipment (PPE) they should be wearing at work during the COVID-19 outbreak. PPE refers to protective gear like masks, gloves, gowns, goggles/safety glasses or face shields.

What PPE should BCGEU members wear at work?

The PPE you should wear at work depends on the specifics of your workplace and your work. The use of PPE should be based on an assessment of the risk of exposure, and must be just one part of a broader plan that includes other measures to limit potential exposure to the virus.

Overall, it should not be necessary for workers to wear PPE at most BCGEU workplaces. Strategies like ensuring sick employees and clients stay home, limiting close contact by reducing non-essential work, allowing workers to work from home, implementing physical distancing, and erecting physical barriers between staff and clients are more effective than PPE in preventing exposure to and transmission of the virus. Frequent hand washing, respiratory etiquette (coughing or sneezing into a tissue or your sleeve, etc.) and enhanced workplace cleaning are also critical prevention measures.

When PPE is required, your employer must provide training on how to use it.

If you are required to wear PPE, you must be trained in how to properly put it on, wear it, and take it off. The risk of infection is increased if potentially contaminated gloves, masks and/or other equipment are not handled properly. Your training should have a practical component, and refreshers or drills should be conducted.

Workers should always apply a precautionary approach to their work. If you have any questions or concerns about protocols or the use of PPE, **stop and talk to your supervisor immediately**. Remember, workers always have the right to refuse unsafe work. More details about the process of refusing unsafe work are available here: https://www.bcgeu.ca/remember_your_right_to_refuse_unsafe_work.

Should I wear a mask at work?

Overall, medical masks and N95 respirators should be reserved for healthcare workers and other workers providing direct care for individuals that are suspected or confirmed with COVID-19.

For the general workforce, the [Public Health Agency of Canada now recommends](#) that in situations where physical distancing is difficult to maintain, workers and their clients should consider wearing a non-medical mask or face covering as an additional measure to protect others around them.

The [BC Centre for Disease Control says](#) that wearing a homemade/cloth mask is a matter of personal choice. Wearing a mask can help in containing your own droplets and protect others, but it will not protect you from COVID-19. Masks may also give a person a false sense of security and are likely to increase the number of times a person will touch their own face (e.g., to adjust the mask). Any mask, no matter how efficient at filtration or how good the seal, will have minimal effect if it is not used together with other preventive measures, such as frequent hand washing and physical distancing.

By law, employers must provide workers with the personal protective equipment (PPE) they need to do their jobs safely, and this equipment should not be replaced by homemade or personal masks. **The BCGEU expects employers to provide appropriate PPE, including masks, to both workers and their clients for use in situations where physical distancing is difficult to maintain.**

Where PPE is not required, the current direction from public health authorities supports the use of non-medical masks or face coverings. **As such, the BCGEU encourages and supports members that may choose to wear a homemade or personal mask at work and/or in the community. Your union will support you to take this precaution while you are at work.** If your employer directs you not to wear a mask in this context, contact your steward and your local OHS rep, [email your local BCGEU area office](#), or email ohs@bcgeu.ca.

More information about non-medical masks or face coverings is available here:

BCCDC: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/masks>

Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public->

[health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/instructions-sew-no-sew-cloth-face-covering.html](https://mailchi.mp/bcgeu/health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/instructions-sew-no-sew-cloth-face-covering.html)

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