



**Town of Provincetown  
260 Commercial Street  
Provincetown, MA 02657**

**Board of Health  
Telephone (508) 487-7020  
Fax (508) 487-7040**

---

**TO: Provincetown Residents and Businesses**  
**CC: Robin Craver, Town Manager**  
**FROM: Dr. Susan Troyan, Vice Chair of Provincetown Board of Health, Steve Katsurinis, Chair of Provincetown Board of Health, and Morgan Clark, Health Director**  
**DATE: April 9, 2020**  
**RE: Mask Use by the General Public during the State of Emergency**

The Provincetown Health Department and the Board of Health have not promoted the widespread use of face masks in our community while social distancing measures are in place. While this follows the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), we would readily promote face mask use if it was necessary. We would like to share the information we have to explain our reasoning.

Face masks are not necessary when social distancing measures are in place. Social distancing measures, and frequent handwashing, are better forms of protection from COVID-19. For those who work in essential services where social distancing measures are not always possible, face masks may help in addition to distancing as much as possible and washing hands frequently.

The information on face mask use and COVID-19 comes from studies on the use of masks in hospitals and other healthcare settings where close contact is required. Past studies of face mask use in the community have been on other respiratory illnesses such as influenza (the flu). Community studies of face mask use took place in college dormitories and in households where one person was ill and other household members did not have symptoms. Some studies showed face masks could lower infection risk only when combined with good hand hygiene, others showed no improvement. Mass gatherings of religious pilgrims have been studied as well and benefit was seen among those with strict face mask use. The widespread community use of facemasks was promoted in East Asia during the SARS epidemic in 2002-04 and is thought to have helped to slow and control the spread, but there was little to no social distancing utilized. That is, they went about their normal daily lives with masks on. The community studies show us face masks may lower the spread of respiratory infections in close contact situations.

These studies in the community used medical masks. We have no modern studies on the use of cloth masks in the community. In a multi-hospital study, cloth masks were compared to medical masks (both used throughout the hospital shift) and to a usual care control group (many of whom used a mask at some point but at much lower levels of use) and showed the healthcare workers using cloth masks had the highest rates of influenza like illness, 13 times higher than those using medical masks (the control group was in between). **Our healthcare workers need the medical masks.**

Social distancing is more effective than face masks in controlling respiratory infections, like COVID-19, that are spread by droplets. While people should not use masks to allow them to get closer to others, there are situations where social distancing is not possible (areas of dense populations or high density housing, people relying on public transportation such as buses and subways, people working in essential services where it is not always possible to maintain a safe distance) and face masks may help. Face mask use by people at high risk of severe disease and their close contacts (those who are immunocompromised, have moderate to severe medical problems and older age) may also be useful.

Given the effectiveness of social distancing, there should be no social pressure to wear or not to wear face masks in Provincetown while distancing continues. For those who want to use face masks, please make your own or use the fabulous cloth face masks being made by our community members. Medical masks should be reserved for healthcare personnel and first responders.

Social distancing is working in Provincetown and we are thankful for our community coming together (while six feet apart!) to help each other be safe and healthy.