

Reusable face masks for vulnerable Victorians

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The Department of Health and Human Services will be distributing 2.1 million reusable face masks to help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Key points

The Department of Health and Human Services will be distributing 2.1 million reusable face masks to:

- Vulnerable Victorians
- Aboriginal Victorians; and
- Workforces who come into direct client contact and deliver Victorian Government funded health and human services to a range of vulnerable Victorians

Reusable face masks will be available for service providers to order in the coming days. People who are eligible to receive a mask should use a face covering until they receive their reusable mask.

People who are eligible to receive a mask will need to visit their local government office, a community health centre, or local pharmacy to collect it. Some doctors' offices may also distribute masks. You cannot order your own mask from the Department of Health and Human Services.

Masks will also be available through other organisations that deliver services to vulnerable Victorians, such as disability service providers, home and community care services, and mental health services.

Victorians who do not meet the eligibility criteria for masks can purchase one themselves, use other face coverings including scarves or bandanas, or [make their own cloth masks](#).

The [online ordering form](#) can also be used to request health information in different languages.

Victorians who meet the eligibility criteria are encouraged to visit their local government office or community pharmacy to collect a mask. You should not make appointments with service providers just to receive a mask.

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Ordering reusable face masks – information for service providers

Masks will be provided for distribution in two ways:

- Local government and community health services will receive an allocation of reusable masks based on their estimated catchment size. They will not be required to order masks.
- Agencies eligible to place orders for masks include:
 - Community pharmacies
 - GP offices
 - Disability agencies and funded residential care services for people with disabilities
 - Clinical and NGO mental health services providing community and residential based care
 - Youth support services
 - Alcohol and drug services (including needle and syringe programs)
 - Family violence services
 - Agencies providing support to people in public housing and homeless people (including refugee and asylum seeker agencies)
 - Supported Residential Services and boarding houses

- Aboriginal Community Controlled (Health) Organisations
- Orders can only be made using the [online ordering form](#) .
- There will be limits on the number of masks each agency will receive, to ensure a fair distribution of masks across Victoria.

Receiving and distributing masks

Each individual will be given two reusable cloth masks and five single-use face masks.

The number of reusable masks available is limited while they are still being manufactured, so some agencies may receive a mix of reusable masks and single-use disposable masks. Once reusable masks are available for delivery, agencies will be able to provide a second reusable cloth mask to individuals who received single-use disposable masks.

Masks will be delivered directly to your agency using Australia Post.

Delivery times will vary depending on your location but will generally take between **three to five working days** from the time your order is confirmed.

Depending on the number of orders received, there will be initial limits placed on the number of masks delivered to each agency, until demand is fully understood and the full quota of masks has been manufactured.

If an agency does not receive its full allocation in the first delivery, a back order will be made and distributed in coming weeks.

Agencies who do receive single-use masks will not need to reorder the reusable masks. These will be kept on back order and delivered when they become available.

Agencies who distribute all masks ordered will be able to make further orders.

Your questions answered

Why is the Victorian Government distributing free reusable face masks?

The Victorian Government wants to protect those members of the community who may become sicker with coronavirus (COVID-19), or who may be less likely to have access to a face covering. Providing these people, and the workers that deliver services to them, with reusable face masks is important to minimising risk of infection across the community - and supporting vulnerable Victorians and our essential health workers.

What sort of masks are being distributed?

The reusable masks consist of three (3) layers of pressed cotton fabric with elastic ear loops. They are designed to be worn multiple times and can be washed between wearing. These masks are a practical alternative to surgical single use masks.

The reusable masks are being developed by ethical manufacturers based in Victoria.

Local manufacturers are working as quickly as possible to deliver the masks, but it will take some time for all the masks to be manufactured. In the interim, to ensure that people can access masks as quickly as possible, single-use surgical masks are also being distributed.

When will the reusable face masks become available?

The first order of reusable face masks will be distributed in the week beginning 27 July, with manufacturing and distribution staggered across August. It is estimated that masks will continue to be distributed until mid-September, or until all masks are distributed.

Orders will continue to be taken until all masks have been distributed.

Who is determined to be a vulnerable Victorian?

Victorians who will be offered reusable face masks will include:

- people over the age of 12 years who are being actively managed for the following chronic conditions:
 - poor immunity
 - heart disease, diabetes and stroke
 - obesity
 - chronic lung disease
 - alcohol and drug dependency
 - frailty
- people living in public housing, in crisis accommodation, or who are homeless
- people living in rooming houses and supported residential services
- people living with disability
- people with other needs including alcohol and drug issues, including those attending primary and secondary needle and syringe programs
- people who have mental health conditions
- young people in residential facilities, and those receiving other health and human services
- young people with health and/or social issues that make them vulnerable
- young people living in mandatory facilities
- Aboriginal people
- Refugee and asylum seekers (including temporary visa holders).

Do agencies have to distribute masks?

It is not compulsory for agencies to distribute masks and some may choose not to do so.

Agencies that choose not to distribute masks can direct clients and consumers to their local government offices or community health centres.

Why can't individuals order these masks?

The ordering process has been limited to agencies and organisations which support vulnerable Victorians.

People who are eligible to receive a mask can visit their local government office or their local pharmacy to access a reusable mask. These agencies may seek evidence of eligibility for reusable masks.

Do individuals need to prove their eligibility to receive a mask?

Service providers are expected to use their judgement in providing masks to vulnerable Victorians and assessing that they meet the criteria for eligibility. Service providers should confirm with individuals that they have not already accessed reusable masks from the program.

What about other people who do not meet the criteria?

People who are not eligible for these reusable masks can access face coverings including [making their own cloth masks](#), alternatives such as scarves or bandanas, or purchasing masks from retailers.

How many masks can agencies order?

Agencies ordering masks are requested to make a realistic assessment of the size of their workforce and their client group when they make an order.

Not all orders will be able to be fulfilled immediately, and agencies may only receive a portion of their order to begin with.

Where orders cannot be filled, agencies may receive an allocation of single-use disposable masks as an alternative. In these situations, a back order will be made for when reusable masks become available.

Agencies will not be required to reorder masks if they receive smaller quantities of the initial order or the alternative single-use masks.

Agencies will be notified if there are limits to the total number of masks to be received. This will be dependent on overall demand for reusable masks.

How long will it take for the masks to be delivered?

Masks are expected to be delivered **within three to five working days** from the time an order is received and confirmed. Australia Post will distribute the masks and there may be longer delays, due to increased demand on postal services during coronavirus (COVID-19).

What should individuals do to protect themselves before they receive their reusable mask?

People can protect themselves by using a range of other face coverings including [making their own cloth masks](#), alternatives such as using scarves or bandanas, or purchasing masks from retailers.

What efforts will be in place to ensure masks are distributed widely?

Supplies of masks will be provided to agencies across Victoria.

To support fair distribution of masks to vulnerable Victorians, agencies should avoid providing duplicate masks to individuals by making some simple enquiries as to whether a client has already received a mask, before offering them one.

How many masks can be provided per person?

Each eligible person can be supplied with two reusable masks.

If a person has received single-use masks, they are still able to receive two reusable masks at a later date.

Having two reusable masks ensures they can be rotated and washed.

Can agencies lodge multiple orders for masks?

Agencies can make a further order for masks once the full initial order has been received and distributed.

How long can a reusable mask be worn for?

A cloth mask should be washed each day after use. However, if during the day your mask is visibly dirty or wet, do not continue wearing it; the mask needs to be washed. If your mask becomes dirty or wet in the time that you are wearing it, you should change to a clean and dry mask.

How long do reusable masks last?

The following are signs that your cloth mask may no longer be offering you the same level of protection it once did:

- it does not fit snugly on your face (for example, you can feel your breath coming out of the sides of the mask)
- it keeps falling off or sliding down
- there are holes in it

- you need to keep adjusting it
- the material has started to wear thin or fray.

Will use instructions be provided?

Each box of reusable masks will include instructions for how to correctly wear and wash the masks.