



# HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WEAR A MASK



Wearing a mask helps reduce the spread of COVID-19. In Ontario, we must wear masks in all public indoor spaces. Wearing a mask might be challenging for a person living with dementia. The person might refuse to wear a mask or forget to where one. They might take the mask off in public or touch their face often.

## When you want the person to wear a mask:

- **Simplify explanations:** Use common words like “flu” instead of “virus” to help make sense of the situation. Avoid giving too many details. Repeat the message often.
- **Enlist their help:** Ask the person to do you a favour or to help the community by wearing a mask. This can help the person’s actions feel more meaningful.
- **Shift the blame:** Let them know it is the Doctor’s orders. You are not responsible for the new rules.
- **Provide choices:** Ask the person to choose the mask or the pattern to help foster their independence.
- **Enhance comfort:** Try different styles, fabrics, and fastenings. Make sure the mask is comfortable.
- **Use humour:** The person might find masks or face coverings odd. The rules may not make sense. If they feel silly, you can laugh with them.

## Tips for helping someone put on a mask:

- **Be empathetic:** Imagine if someone entered your personal space and placed a cloth over your face. This can be uncomfortable and scary.
- **Use a gentle approach:**
  - Don't immediately take over or assume that they need help. Instead, ask them.
  - If they do need help, try not to approach the person from the side or from behind.
  - Try not to hover over the person. Connect with them at eye-level.
  - Tell the person that you are going to touch them before you do.
  - Show them what you are about to do by putting on your own mask first.
  - Foster the person's independence by having them hold the mask as you gently guide their hands.
- **Build tolerance:** Practice wearing the mask at home so they get used to how it feels.

## Tips for communicating with your mask on:

- **Tone of voice:** You may need to speak louder with your mask on, but try to keep your tone friendly.
- **The eyes communicate:** The person can tell that you are genuine and caring by looking at your eyes when you smile.
- **Use body language:** Make sure you have an open and friendly posture around them.

## Common challenges with wearing a mask:

- **The person forgets to bring a mask when they leave the house:** Try posting a sign on their door. Big words and pictures can sometimes act as a reminder to grab their mask and put it on. If the person continues to forget, consider whether someone else can make the trip for them.
- **The person pulls their mask down or off in public:** If you are with them, offer hand sanitizer often to ensure clean hands when they touch their face. Be ready to gently remind the person that they need to keep the mask on. Make sure to remain calm and use a friendly tone of voice. Use gestures if needed.
- **The person is fearful of wearing a mask:** Consider how their past experiences might be causing anxiety. Let the person know that you are here for them. If the person is anxious that they will stop breathing, acknowledge this feeling. Practice taking deep breaths together, with your masks on.

For more information about masks and COVID-19, visit the Ottawa Public health website: <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/masks.aspx>

To seek guidance for your unique caregiving situation, contact your Dementia Care Coach. If you don't have a Dementia care Coach, call us at:

**Ottawa:** 613-523-4004 **Renfrew-County:** 1-888-411-2067 | [info@dsorc.org](mailto:info@dsorc.org) | [DementiaHelp.ca](http://DementiaHelp.ca)

Charitable Registration 11878 5013 RR0001