

Tips for Conversations with Customers/Clients about Wearing Face Covering

The following tips came out of a [Whatcom COVID-19 Employer Support Task Force](#) Forum on July 10, 2020 called "Let's Talk about Masks." This was the first in a series of forums created to support businesses and organizations in Whatcom County. To learn about upcoming forums, visit whatcomtogether.org/events.

Create layers of protection: In addition to requiring everyone entering the business/organization to wear a face covering, use many other safety measures as well such as:

- Limit entrances to the business/organization.
- Control entrances - Assign a staff person to monitor the entrance to make sure people wear a mask and understand safety procedures before they enter.
- Have people make appointments/reservations if possible, to control the number of people in the facility at one time.
- Install plexiglass barriers between customers and staff working behind a counter or cash register.
- Use floor markers to guide people in staying at least six feet apart.
- Arrange furniture with a lot of space between seats.
- In a restaurant, have server deliver food to an extra table added to the end of customer's table, or use large catering trays and portable stands to set them on to extend distance from table.

Communicate with customers/clients about safety practices in many different ways:

Every message that goes out from the business should include information about safety practices and expectations so the customer/client is not surprised.

- Verbal – Train staff so everyone is consistent in their verbal communications to customers/clients about expectations.
- Written signage – outside, on windows and doors, at cash register, table tents, etc.
 - Use humorous and clever language to get people's attention in a positive way.
- Direct communications – Include information with appointment reminders sent by mail, email, or phone.
- Video ([see example from Gym Star](#)).



Be prepared to help people understand and comply with safety rules: Assume some people will forget or will have resistance to following the rules and will need extra support to do so.

- Tell staff to be nice, supportive, sensitive, and offer options, but also be firm and hold the line – do not allow people in the business without a face covering.
- Provide a script for staff so everyone is consistent in delivering the message ([see example from Food Co-op](#)).
- Have disposable masks available to give away if someone forgets. Can also sell reusable masks (can customize them for your business as a fun touch).
- Offer many different ways for customers/clients to get services so people can choose the safest option for themselves (e.g., online or phone orders, curbside pick-up, home delivery, special hours reserved for more vulnerable people).
- Make accommodations for people who say they cannot wear a face covering (e.g., curbside pickup, delivery), but do not allow people inside without appropriate face covering.

Avoid conflict but be prepared if it does happen: Make sure that staff know the next step to take if someone objects to wearing a face covering.

- Limit the number of entrances and control entrances so any conflictual conversations can happen before the person goes inside.
- Do not spend time arguing with someone who does not comply. Use de-escalation techniques (e.g., help person see they have the power to make a choice for themselves).
- Staff should know when and who to call for help if things get heated (e.g., anyone who is being persistent about not following face covering rules should be referred to the business owner/manager).
- When a manager is interacting with an upset customer/client, make sure that a second person is available to observe and intervene if needed.
- If it is possible for the owner/manager to delay talking with an upset customer/client for about 24 hours, the person will have had a chance to calm down and conversation may be more fruitful.