

Start Wearing Double Masks — Even Outdoors



The spread of more contagious coronavirus variants in Canada amid already high levels of COVID-19 makes it a critical time to think about the masks we wear. Whether that means finding better quality masks, doubling up on masks, or wearing them in settings we wouldn't normally think to, experts say it's time we step up our game.

The variant discovered in the U.K., known as B117, is estimated to be at least **56 per cent more transmissible and potentially more deadly** than the original coronavirus strain.

But even as COVID-19 case numbers show early signs of slowing down in Canada, experts say it's becoming more important than ever to lower our risk of exposure as much as possible to prevent variants from taking hold here.

'Time to step it up' with masks

Canada currently recommends the use of three-layer non-medical masks with a filter layer to prevent the spread of the virus, but has not updated its recommendations since November, before the emergence of new variants. Canadians should opt for masks that offer better protection whenever possible. **Canada's top public health doctor now recommends 3-layer non-medical masks**



Two masks can boost protection against COVID-19 variants

Double masking is growing in popularity with rising concerns over COVID-19 variants. Are two masks necessary? What's the safest way to wear them? Make sure your mask isn't too loose fitting, which could put you at heightened risk of exposure in situations such as in-store shopping. Putting a second mask on or finding a different mask that fits the face can be necessary

Outdoors not without risk

Coronavirus variants can also change the level of risk we face in situations that are typically more safe, such as being outdoors. Places such as San Francisco and New Brunswick have mandated outdoor mask use, and Toronto recently announced it now requires face masks for outdoor activities such as skating. The risk is much lower outdoors than indoors, but with the new variants, we should be more careful outdoors as well as indoors.

While not common, there have been cases of outdoor transmission of COVID-19 in Canada.

How the spread of coronavirus variants could completely change the pandemic

It comes down to being in close contact, without a mask, talking loudly or sharing food and drinks that makes it risky even outside.

There has not seen transmission from brief outdoor encounters, waiting in line outside or at outdoor picnics where people maintain a reasonable distance and wear masks when close for short periods of time.

Coronavirus variants can also change the level of risk we face in situations that are typically more safe, such as being outdoors. While the risk of exposure outdoors is less than indoors, the risk of both is higher due to the emergence of coronavirus variants.