



# Mask Use: tips for employees





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# Introduction

## **The hospitality industry thrives on providing excellent customer service.**

As we adapt and navigate our way through the different alert level requirements, providing a consistent, positive customer experience is as important as ever.

The delivery of our customer service relies not only on our verbal communication but in addition the way we communicate through our facial expressions.

However, it is now a requirement for customer facing staff to wear masks when serving customers and it is also a recommendation for other staff.

## **How does that impact on the delivery of customer service?**

Although initially they can be perceived as a barrier to providing good customer service, masks shouldn't keep us from doing all of the things we might normally do when interacting with customers.

In this guide we provide some tips for employees to help them adapt to this new way of interacting with customers, providing ideas on incorporating body language, perfecting the “smize” (smiling with your eyes), using gestures and body language and how to deal with difficult customers.

## Who has to wear masks?

- All customer-facing staff need to wear masks.
- At a social gathering all staff must wear a mask.
- At all other times, it is recommended that staff wear masks.
- Customers are encouraged to wear masks, removing them to eat and drink.
- Customers must wear a face covering when picking up a takeaway order.
- Delivery drivers under Alert level 3 & 2 are also required to wear a mask when outside of their vehicle.

# Smiling

Smiling, it isn't just with your mouth. Even with a mask on you can still perfect a smile.

It is easy to tell when you are smiling - watch how your eyes change. This is the 'smize'.

Work on your smize by practicing different facial expressions with your mask on.

Smiling while talking makes your voice warmer and friendlier too, physically smiling helps the voice smile as well.



# Body language

Nonverbal communication is also a great way of providing meaningful interactions.

A nod, a wave or a "hello" can create a connection.



Tips to presenting positive body language:

- Don't cross your arms
- Face your customers when interacting with them
- Nod or use eye contact, this shows you are actively listening to the customer.
- If walking customers to tables use hand gestures to direct them.
- Try to avoid talking while your back is turned when wearing a mask as your voice can be muffled.

Lean forward and turn your ear toward your customer when they are speaking - this shows you are actively engaging in what they have to say.

# How to speak

Practice how to communicate clearly while wearing a mask.

Sometimes role-playing is a fantastic way to ensure you are clear with your verbal communication.

Practice with someone else, greeting each other with your masks on,

- Are your voices clear or muffled?
- Do they need to speak clearer, or louder?
- Would it help if you spoke more slowly?

Try practicing at a distance so you can put yourself in your customers shoes.



# Tone

Experiencing hospitality staff wearing masks will be new to your customers too. Greeting them with a friendly positive tone can enhance their first impression.

With some customers being apprehensive about returning to public spaces, communication is a way of making them feel relaxed and reassured.

**"Kia ora, welcome back, it's great to see you again"**

**"How have you been?"**

**"I am happy that you have come in today. You'll see there's been some changes"**

**"Fantastic, you have scanned in, now let's find you a table"**



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# Dealing with customers

## DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

Most customers will adapt to the new requirements around mask use, but from time to time you may encounter someone who is resistant to the new measures now in place. This is a good time to ensure everyone in the team is on the same page when it comes to managing tricky customers.

Here are some tips for dealing with difficult customers:

- Listen to the customer and try not to argue about the situation.
- Remain calm and speak slowly and softly (but clearly).
- Try not to take it personally, sometimes people are just having a bad day and although that doesn't excuse someone's behaviour, there could be a number of other factors that can explain why they are acting in that manner.
- Know when to get support, call a manager or owner for help if you are feeling uncomfortable or the situation is escalating.
- Follow your company guidelines when a customer doesn't want to comply with the rules.
- Try and find a solution.
- Have some prewritten dialogue to repeat to customers. This may cover mask use, scanning in or other requirements as they may all be new to the customer. For example:
  - "For the safety of you, our team and other customers, we need you to comply with the rules and scan or sign in"
  - "By observing the social distancing rules, it allows us to remain open and following the guidelines"
  - "I know it can be a little harder to communicate with the mask on, but it's now a requirement for us to wear them"





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# Dealing with customers

## PUT YOURSELF IN THE CUSTOMERS SHOES

**This is a good time to put yourself in the customer's shoes; walk into your restaurant like you are a customer.**

Not only will frontline staff wearing masks be new to them, they might also need a reminder of some of the other requirements at different alert levels.

- Is it easy to see where the Covid tracer QR code or contact tracing register is located?
- Is there correct spacing between the tables and a good flow in the restaurant?
- Are you asking your customers to wait to be seated? Is there clear signage on where to stand?
- Is there clear signage on where the toilets are, so new customers are not wandering around looking for the bathrooms?
- Consider your music volume - it can be harder for customers to hear what your teams are saying when they're wearing a mask, so you might need to turn down the volume a little to compensate.

- Highlight what practices you are doing to ensure the safety of your customers so they feel confident and reassured about dining in your establishment?

Take time to think about all of your customers. Do you have customers who are hard of hearing or can only lipread? How can you combat speaking with your mask on. There are some great courses available online that show different ways to sign to your customers and use alternate ways of communication.

By making some small adjustments, it can make all the difference, instilling customer confidence and enabling you to continue to offer the same fantastic customer service that our industry is renowned for.

# Customer comms

**Customers may feel more confident if they are aware of what to expect when they arrive.**

How you are managing new requirements and what steps is your business doing to promote safe dining?

Do you require a booking?  
Are you happy with walk-ins?  
Are they aware there are new rules around mask use and keeping customer records?

Update your website and social media with your operation's practices.

You may even want to consider doing a video showing someone entering your establishment and following your practices, to show them what to expect.

# Mask use



## HOW TO SAFELY PUT ON A FACE MASK

- Ensure your face mask is clean and dry and is not damaged.
- Before putting on your face mask, clean your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitiser (containing at least 60 percent alcohol). Ensure your hands are dry.
- Place the face mask over your nose and mouth and secure with ties or loops. Make sure the mask fits snugly, moulded to your face and around your nose. Make sure the mask fully covers your nose, mouth and chin. Your mask should be comfortable, with no gaps around the mask and your face, and allow you to breathe easily.
- Clean your hands again (as above).

## WEARING A FACE MASK

- Do not touch the front of the face mask. If you do, clean your hands and dry thoroughly.
- Avoid touching your face, as infection can still be introduced by touching your eyes or if you are not wearing your face mask correctly.
- Face masks should not be moved during use. This includes being pulled up or pulled down below your chin. If you need to remove your mask (for example, to eat) – remove it safely, dispose of it appropriately (or wash if a home-made facial covering or cloth mask) and clean your hands.
- Replace the face mask if it becomes damp, damaged or soiled.

## REMOVING A FACE MASK

- Clean your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitiser (containing at least 60 percent alcohol). Ensure your hands are dry.
- Remove the face mask from behind (do not touch the front of the mask) by untying ties or removing loops and pull it away from your face. Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose and mouth when removing your mask.
- Clean or dispose of it appropriately.
- Clean your hands again.

**[HOW TO WEAR FACE COVERINGS: COVID-19.GOVT.NZ](https://www.covid19.govt.nz)**





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