

Proper Usage of Face Masks/Coverings to Protect Against COVID-19

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Preface

The purpose of this guidance is to provide useful advice and recommendations on the proper use of face masks/coverings used to cover the mouth and nose (“half-mask” as opposed to “full-face” masks) to either protect the wearer or protect people to which the wearer is exposed. Some of these face coverings are tools that can be used to prevent the spread of disease. However, it is important to recognize that the best way to prevent exposure to the new coronavirus is through a combination of good practices, including hand hygiene, physical (social) distancing and use of a face covering when appropriate. Use of a face mask/covering MUST NOT take the place of proper hand hygiene and physical distancing but be used in addition to these critical practices.

The World Health Organization (WHO) currently recommends that a face mask only be worn if: you have symptoms associated with COVID-19 (cough, fever, shortness of breath) **or** you are healthy and caring for someone who might be infected with coronavirus.¹

Based on new evidence, however, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommend "wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain...especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Recent studies found that a significant portion of individuals with coronavirus lack symptoms ('asymptomatic') and that even those who eventually develop symptoms ('pre-symptomatic') can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people interacting in proximity - for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing - even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms."²

The cloth face coverings recommended by CDC are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.³

Given this CDC recommendation, companies in the food supply chain may need to implement standard operating procedures for the use of face coverings or masks. It's important to note that supplies of cloth face coverings may be in high demand and food companies should evaluate whether they can provide disposable face coverings or masks; and in their absence consider reusable cloth masks that can be appropriately collected after their use and laundered prior to

¹ WHO. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Advice for the Public: When and How to Use Masks. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>. Accessed March 20, 2020.

² CDC. Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmission. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>. Accessed April 3, 2020.

³ CDC. Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmission. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>. Accessed April 3, 2020.

reuse in the facility. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has also issued guidance specifically for food settings.⁴

This Guidance is Intended to Assist in Proper Usage and Disposal of Face Masks/Coverings

General Purpose of Face Masks/Coverings

Face masks that cover the lower face (“half-mask”), including nose and mouth, are one type of personal protective equipment (PPE) used to protect the wearer from airborne particles and liquids that can contaminate the lower face and/or mouth, nose, and lungs. Similarly, some face masks can prevent the wearer’s respiratory droplets from being released, thereby limiting exposure to others. Given the limited supply of many types of face masks during the current COVID-19 crisis, particularly, surgical and N-95 type masks, there are many cloth and homemade, Do-it-Yourself (DIY) face coverings being made and used that do not meet the same standards of protection as surgical and N-95 masks; therefore, it is recommended that companies determine how these masks may or may not be used by employees.

A face mask/covering is a tool to help avoid and/or contain illness. It does not guarantee that the wearer will not acquire illness. Therefore, someone wearing a face covering should not decrease the frequency of handwashing and should not expose themselves to potentially sick individuals unnecessarily because they think that the mask will protect them. The wearer should take all precautions they would normally take if they were not wearing a mask.

Surgical -Type Masks

Surgical masks are generally loose-fitting, **single-use** devices that create a physical barrier between the mouth and nose of the wearer and the immediate environment but are NOT designed to provide a tight fit around the nose and mouth. Surgical masks used in the U.S. are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Surgical-type masks can be labeled as surgical, isolation, dental, or medical procedure masks. They might also have ear loops, ties, or bands and are typically designed to fit loosely (though some styles are made to fit tight over the face). Additionally, they might have a face shield to cover the eyes and other parts of the face. Surgical face masks do not provide complete protection from germs and other contaminants because of the loose fit between the surface of the face mask and the wearer’s face.

Cloth/DIY Face Coverings and When to Wear Them

Government agencies and health professionals strongly urge individuals to not report to work when they are ill. Additionally, FDA’s Good Manufacturing Practices, 3rd party audits, and most companies’ policies explicitly restrict ill workers. In general, authorities recommend individuals wear a face mask/covering if they are sick, although an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 should be isolated and not allowed in the workplace until they are cleared to return.⁵ There is

⁴ FDA. Should employees in retail food and food production settings wear face coverings to prevent exposure to COVID-19? (Posted April 4, 2020) <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

⁵ CDC. What to Do if You are Sick. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>

increasing public concern that potentially pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic individuals can unknowingly transmit the virus to others.

Due to the shortage of surgical/N-95 face masks, face coverings made of cotton or other fabrics are being produced commercially and by individuals, and can be used as an additional means to protect wearers from exposure to the coronavirus or reduce potential transmission from the wearer to other individuals.

CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in settings where social (physical) distancing measures are difficult to maintain. The use of a face covering could slow the spread and transmission of the coronavirus between individuals; however, wearing a face covering should NOT take the place of other critical measures such as frequent hand washing and physical distancing measures.⁶ CDC provides additional guidance on cloth and DIY face coverings -- *Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19.*⁷

NOTE: Seek approval from management before wearing a face covering.

How to Properly Put on a Face Mask⁸

1. Before putting on a mask, clean hands with soap and water.⁹
2. Determine which side of the mask is the top. This is the edge used to mold to the shape of the nose, if applicable.
 - For some masks, the top side has a stiff bendable edge
3. Determine which side of the mask is the front.
 - For some masks, the front of the mask is usually colored and should face away from you with the inside (white side) touching your face.
4. Follow specific instructions for the type of mask you are using.
 - Face mask with ear loops:
 - Hold mask by the ear loops. Place a loop around each ear.
 - Face mask with ties:
 - Bring the mask to your nose level and place ties over the crown of your head and secure with a bow.
 - Face mask with bands:
 - Hold mask in your hand with the nosepiece or top of the mask at fingertips, allowing the headbands to hang freely. Bring the mask to your nose level and pull the top strap over your head so that it rests over the crown of your head. Pull the bottom strap over your head so that it rests at the nape of your neck.
5. Mold or pinch the top edge to the shape of your nose, if applicable.
6. Pull the bottom of your mask over your mouth and chin.
7. A mask is worn properly when it covers the nose, mouth and chin.

⁶ <https://www.feedingus.org/> Accessed April 6, 2020.

⁷ CDC. Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

⁸ How to Put on and Remove a Face Mask. <https://www.sfdcdcp.org/communicable-disease/healthy-habits/how-to-put-on-and-remove-a-face-mask/>. Accessed March 30, 2020.

⁹ CDC. When and How to Wash Your Hands. <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>. Accessed March 31, 2020.

While Wearing a Face Mask/Covering

Individuals who are not accustomed to wearing a face mask might find the mask uncomfortable or distracting. An important component of a disease-prevention strategy is to limit touching the face. An uncomfortable or poorly fitted mask could encourage touching the face, which is counter to the goal of wearing a face covering. It is critical that wearers do not inadvertently increase their exposure by continually adjusting the mask/covering and touching the face.

DO	DO NOT
✓ Wash hands before and after putting on mask	✗ Don't wear if wet or soiled
✓ Make sure the mask has no defects (e.g. tears, torn straps, or ear loops)	✗ Don't leave mask hanging off one ear, hanging around neck, or place on top of head
✓ Secure the mask around head and neck or ears	✗ Don't place mask on surfaces (e.g. countertops) to store for reuse
✓ Ensure mask is covering nose, mouth, and chin	✗ Don't reuse a single-use mask, dispose after wearing once
✓ Only touch straps/bands when removing and disposing a mask	✗ Don't touch the front or back sides of the mask, as they could be contaminated after use

When to Change a Face Covering

Good Manufacturing Practices should be followed when wearing face coverings, as with smocks, gloves, etc. and should be changed if they become soiled. Ideally, face coverings should be changed at every break, restroom visit, or any other reason to remove the face covering. Never wear an individual face covering for longer than one day. If an employee must use a single cloth face covering throughout the day due to supply limitations, they should limit exposure to food contact surfaces and foods and follow the recommendations in this document about putting on and removing a face mask/covering. Discard cloth face coverings that:¹⁰

- No longer cover the nose and mouth
- Have stretched out or damaged ties or straps
- Cannot stay on the face
- Have holes or tears in the fabric

How to Remove a Face Mask¹¹

1. Clean your hands with soap and water before touching the mask.¹²

¹⁰ California Department of Public Health. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Face-Coverings-Guidance.aspx>

¹¹ How to Put on and Remove a Face Mask. <https://www.sfdcp.org/communicable-disease/healthy-habits/how-to-put-on-and-remove-a-face-mask/>. Accessed March 30, 2020.

2. Avoid touching the front and inside of the mask as these surfaces of the mask may now be contaminated.
3. Only touch ear loops, ties, or bands to remove masks.
 - Face mask with ear loops:
 - Hold both ear loops and lift and remove the mask.
 - Face mask with ties:
 - Untie the bottom bow first, then untie the top bow. Pull the mask away from you as the ties are loosened.
 - Face mask with bands:
 - Lift the bottom strap over your head, then pull the top strap over your head.
4. Dispose of single-use mask in a closed bin. Avoid shaking or other activity that may increase the possibility of dispersing droplets in the air.
5. Wash your hands again with soap and water.¹³

Laundering Reusable Cloth Face Coverings

As facilities consider using reusable cloth face coverings for employees, it is recommended that these coverings are provided to employees and laundered like other PPE (*e.g. fabric gloves, frocks/smocks, lab coats, etc.*) by the facility.

- For cloth coverings, washing with common laundry detergents, hot water and complete drying at a hot temperature setting is recommended.¹⁴
- Ensure that a clearly defined and washable hamper/cart is identified for collecting used face coverings, if face coverings are provided by the employer. (If employees provide their own face coverings, they should securely store used/soiled ones in a bag to take home and launder.)
- ***NOTE: Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an unwell person CAN be washed with items that have not been in contact with a sick individual***

For persons engaged in cleaning:

- Do not shake dirty laundry. This minimizes the possibility of dispersing virus in the air.
- Clean and disinfect anything used for transporting laundry (hampers, bags, etc.) with typical cleaning products.
- Wear disposable gloves while handling soiled items.
- Wash hands immediately after removing gloves or after handling dirty items.
- Clean and disinfect hampers/carts/bags daily.

Additional Resources:

- [Video - When to use a mask](#)
- [Video - How to wear a mask](#)
- [Infographics - Mask best practices](#)

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ California Department of Public Health. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Face-Coverings-Guidance.aspx>

Appendix

Other Types of Masks/Coverings

N95 masks¹⁵ are respiratory protective devices designed to achieve a very close facial fit and very efficient filtration of airborne particles. The 'N95' designation means that when subjected to careful testing, the respirator blocks at least 95 percent of very small (0.3 micron) test particles. If properly fitted, the filtration capabilities of N95 respirators exceed those of surgical face masks. However, even a properly fitted N95 respirator does not eliminate the risk of illness or death.

NOTE: During the COVID-19 pandemic, N95 respirator masks are reserved for healthcare workers.

Dust masks are designed to reduce the user's exposure to pollen, dust and other airborne nuisance particles commonly encountered when doing yard work or other activities around the home or job site. These can typically be purchased in home improvement stores but are NOT designed nor capable of providing a high-level barrier from hazardous microorganisms such as coronavirus.

Supported by:



¹⁵ N95 Respirators and Surgical Masks (Face Masks). <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/personal-protective-equipment-infection-control/n95-respirators-and-surgical-masks-face-masks>. Accessed March 30, 2020.