Proper Usage of Face Masks 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 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 masks 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 mask when appropriate. 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]

At this time, it is critical for employers and employees of food manufacturing facilities to understand that although wearing a face mask can limit the spread of germs (viruses and bacteria), it is ***NOT*** necessary, nor recommended for use by asymptomatic individuals.[1]

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[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

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

General Purpose of Face Masks

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. ***Using an appropriate government-approved mask is always preferred.***[1] However, given the limited supply of many types of face masks during the current COVID-19 crisis, there are many non-approved cloth and homemade DIY masks being made and used; therefore, it is recommended that companies determine how these masks may or may not be used by employees.

A face mask 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 mask 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 Face Masks

The most common type of face mask that is likely to be available and used in food facilities is a surgical face mask. 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.

When to Wear A Face Mask

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 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.[2] There is increasing public concern that potentially pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic individuals can unknowingly transmit the virus to others. Currently, WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) only recommend use of a surgical face mask if an individual is infected or caring for someone who is ill.

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

How to Properly Put on a Face Mask[3]

1. Before putting on a mask, clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. [4]
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.
    o For some masks, the top side has a stiff bendable edge
3. Determine which side of the mask is the front.
    o 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.
    o Face mask with ear loops:
        ▪ Hold mask by the ear loops. Place a loop around each ear.
    o 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.
    o 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.

While Wearing a Mask

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 mask. It is critical that wearers do not inadvertently increase their exposure by continually adjusting the mask and touching the face.

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[3] How to Put on and Remove a Face Mask. https://www.sfcdcp.org/communicable-disease/healthy-habits/how-to-put-on-and-remove-a-face-mask/. Accessed March 30, 2020.
[4] CDC. When and How to Wash Your Hands. https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html. Accessed March 31, 2020.

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

How to Remove a Face Mask[5]

1. Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer before touching the mask.[6]
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.
   - *Information regarding use and laundering reusable masks can be found in the appendix*.
5. Wash your hands again with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer.[7]

NOTE: Always follow specific product instructions on usage and storage, as well as how to put on and remove a mask.

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[5] How to Put on and Remove a Face Mask. https://www.sfcdcp.org/communicable-disease/healthy-habits/how-to-put-on-and-remove-a-face-mask/. Accessed March 30, 2020.
[7] *Id.*
[7] *Id.*

Additional Resources:

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

Appendix

Other Types of Masks

N95 Respirator Mask: An N95 mask[8] is a respiratory protective device 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: 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.

Homemade/DIY Mask: Face coverings made of cotton or other fabrics are being produced by companies and individuals and should be used as "last resort" measures to protect users from exposure to the coronavirus or reduce potential transmission from the user to other individuals.[9]

While dust masks and these other "last resort" methods to cover the nose and mouth could provide a limited degree of protection, there are currently no official recommendations to use these in controlling transmission of the coronavirus between individuals; however it has been suggested that taking such measures could help reduce community spread as long as other critical measures such as frequent hand washing and physical distancing are continued.

Laundering Reusable Cloth Masks

As facilities consider using reusable cloth masks for employees, it is recommended that these masks are laundered like other PPE (*e.g. fabric gloves, frocks/smocks, lab coats, etc.)* by the facility*.* For cloth masks, the use of common detergents at the warmest temperatures are recommended.[10]
- Wash items according to manufacturer's instructions
- Use the warmest setting and dry items completely
- ***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:

[8] 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.
[9] Davies, Anna et al. (2013). Testing the Efficacy of Homemade Masks: Would They Protect in an Influenza Pandemic?. Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness. Doi:10.1017/dmp.2013.43.
[10] Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Homes and Residential Communities. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html#precautions, Accessed March 26, 2020.

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