



Universal Face Covering Recommendation for State Agencies and Essential Services

I. Purpose

This document provides universal face covering guidance for state response agencies and employees providing essential services.

II. Background

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus that has emerged and caused coronavirus disease (abbreviated as COVID-19). Public health experts continue to learn about COVID-19, but based on current data and similar coronaviruses, the virus is believed to be spread between close contacts via respiratory droplets or contact with contaminated surfaces. While the most effective measures for preventing further spread of COVID-19 remain staying home when you are sick, maintaining physical separation between other people while out in public (at least 6 feet), and frequently washing your hands with either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub, face coverings are an additional tool that may be used by the general public and essential workers during a crisis to protect each other from respiratory droplets produced when we cough, sneeze, or talk.

IDPH recently issued [interim guidance](#) recommending implementation of universal face covering or masking policies for all staff working in congregate living facilities such as State correctional centers, juvenile detention centers, and long term care centers. On April 3, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a recommendation for the general public. To slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others, CDC now recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies), especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.

III. Recommendation

Until further notice, IDPH recommends that all state agencies implement a universal face covering policy requiring staff who are not working from home to wear a cloth face covering or mask when working at State facilities, alternate work locations (i.e., mobile testing sites, emergency operations centers, multi-agency coordination sites, etc.), regulated facilities while conducting inspections, and other public settings. Face coverings should be worn at all times when social distancing measures are

difficult or impractical to sustain. This includes but is not limited to staff and volunteers working in the State Laboratories and the State Emergency Operations Center. This recommendation does not extend to employees who are currently working from home or where downsized operations make social distancing measures sustainable.

Where possible, State agencies should also consider additional opportunities for social distancing, such as increased use of teleworking, increasing physical space between employees at specific worksites, and cohorting or grouping some staff and allowing/encouraging them to alternate between teleworking and working onsite. This is consistent with CDC's Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers and [conventional capacity strategies](#) for optimizing supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Due to severe shortages of PPE and other medical devices, State agencies may need to consider a multiple strategies for implementing this universal face covering guidance after additional social distancing measures have been considered: 1) allowing employees to supply their own homemade cloth face covering or mask, or 2) purchasing cloth face coverings or masks where available. Do not purchase N95 or surgical masks unless DPH has indicated that those masks are appropriate for your employees. They are currently in short supply and should be reserved for health care professionals providing direct care of patients with respiratory illness.

IV. Best Practices

Best practices for wearing fabric or cloth masks include:

- Each employee should have 2 or more masks so they can be laundered daily. This will also be helpful if their mask becomes wet, damaged, or no longer fits and they need to replace it.
- Homemade masks should be designed from materials that will hold up to daily washing and drying.
- Employees should be instructed to wash their hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water before putting on a mask, immediately after removing it, or if they touch the mask while using it.
- Avoid touching the outer surface of the mask when removing it. Remove the mask by untying it or unfastening the ear loops. Place it in a bag or bin away from small children or pets until it can be laundered. If employees must

remove and reuse their mask while on duty, they should be careful to set the mask face down on a clean surface or place it in a bag.

This does not replace but enhances previous IDPH guidance concerning social distancing and universal face coverings in congregate living facilities.

V. Additional online resources

Additional resources, including instructions for making homemade cloth face coverings and videos are available from a number of online resources:

CDC DIY Cloth Face Coverings (April 4) – <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

CDC Recommendations for Cloth Face Covers FAQ – <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-faq.html>

U.S. Surgeon General How to Make Your Own Face Covering (YouTube) – <https://youtu.be/tPx1yqvJgf4>

CDC Cloth Face Covers FAQ – <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-faq.html>

Pennsylvania Department of Public Health Guidance on Homemade Masks during COVID-19 – <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Diseases%20and%20Conditions/Homemade%20Mask%20Guidance.pdf>

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

Minnesota Department of Health Interim Guidance on Alternative Facemasks – <http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hcp/masksalt.pdf>

WHO: When and How to Use Masks (Videos and Infographics) – <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>