

OVERVIEW: This document provides general guidance on the use and care of cloth masks. In accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and public health guidelines, wearing face masks and adhering to social distancing practices, including maintaining six feet of physical distance between another person, are critical components in helping to maintain the health and safety of the entire campus community. Homemade masks made of fabric and cloth are not considered Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). However, these masks can be an effective complement to social distancing, handwashing, and other mitigation measures.

WHY UNIVERSAL MASKING? COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice (e.g., while shouting, chanting, or singing). These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Cloth masks limit the wearer from spreading infectious droplets in the air. Using homemade or cloth masks will prevent those who may be infectious but only mildly symptomatic or non-symptomatic from spreading the virus to others.

UNIVERSAL MASKING REQUIREMENTS AND SOURCING: Employees, students, and visitors are required to practice physical distancing and wear face masks/coverings at all times in campus buildings (e.g., must be worn in offices, classrooms, labs, hallways, stairways, etc.); outdoors when they cannot be physically distant from others; and whenever state or local laws require. Masks do not need to be worn when eating or drinking, when isolated in a private office or vehicle, or when use adversely affects an employee's safety or health. The University will make cloth masks available through Penn State General Stores (Item # Z11683000) as available in the [eBuy catalog](#). As additional supplies are being obtained, in the interim limited amounts of surgical masks (Item # Z11682008) can be used until cloth masks are available. Employees may use homemade cloth masks if they meet the guidance outlined by the [CDC](#) and [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#).

RESERVE RESPIRATORS FOR HEALTHCARE AND REQUIRED OPERATIONS: N95 respirators and surgical masks are designed to protect those working in high risk situations with a likelihood of exposure. Medical-grade masks should not be used for "universal masking" once cloth masks are available.

GENERAL NOTES ABOUT UNIVERSAL MASKING:

- Remember this saying: "***My mask protects you, your mask protects me.***" If you start to become ill, the purpose of the mask is to minimize the spread of germs if you cough.
- Masks should meet the following guidelines:
 - The mask should fit snugly around the mouth/nose and comfortably against the side of the face.
 - Secured with ties or ear loops.
 - Includes multiple layers of fabric.
 - Allows for breathing without restriction.
 - Able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

Note: Masks with exhaust valves are not acceptable (the valves allow air and respiratory droplets to escape the mask, which results in less protection for others).

Note: Gaiters – there is evidence that single-layer face coverings, including many neck gaiters,

are not as effective in stopping respiratory droplets as multi-layer face coverings. At this time, it is recommended that all faculty, staff, and students wear a multi-layer mask or a procedure mask.

- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Maintain physical and social distancing by keeping 6 feet of separation when possible. Continue to wash your hands often throughout the day for at least 20 seconds.

USE AND CARE OF CLOTH MASKS: Best practices for fabric and cloth masks are as follows:

- Wash all masks upon receiving. These are not sterilized.
- Wash the mask after every use.
- Wash in hot water with regular detergent. Dry completely on a hot setting.
- Before putting on a mask and immediately after removing, wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Ensure the mask fits snugly around the mouth and nose.
- Do not wear the mask if it is damp or wet from spit or mucus.
- Remove the mask from behind without touching the front side.

EXCEPTIONS FOR WEARING CLOTH MASKS: The use of cloth masks should not create an unsafe condition for the employee when operating equipment, executing a task, or restricting their ability to breathe while working. Employees should notify their supervisor and/or Safety Officer if wearing a mask presents a health and safety concern when conducting a work activity or impedes their vision.

Cloth masks do not need to be worn when conducting the following activities:

- Eating or drinking
- Isolated in a private office or vehicle
- Activities where heat stress represents a health and safety concern to the wearer of the cloth mask and physical distancing cannot be maintained, then a face shield shall be worn as an alternative face covering.

Note employees and students **must have a cloth mask in their possession at all times** and then immediately worn prior to entering buildings or otherwise in close proximity to other individuals.

REFERENCES:

PA Department of Health – [Guidance on Homemade Masks during COVID-19](#)

CDC – [Cloth Face Covers](#)

PA Department of Health – [Public Health Safety Measures for Businesses](#)