

## Face Mask Selection and the Use of Cloth Face Masks

Government officials, from the local to national level, are beginning to recommend routine use of face masks for everyone, including cloth and homemade masks, while out in public. This communication provides information about cloth masks, clarifies that they are not to be considered Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and includes some information on when to use surgical and N95 masks.

We have started receiving shipments of surgical masks, although still not at the level that is needed. These are actively being shipped to all our provider operations. The ED/Branch Manager and nursing leadership are responsible to ensure that masks and all PPE are securely stored and distributed appropriately (per our [PPE use protocols](#)), that our staff is educated, and that [PPE conservation](#) efforts are in place.

### The Use of Cloth or Homemade Masks

According to the CDC, cloth masks are not considered PPE, and do not meet the CDC requirements for respiratory protection. In our settings, the use of a cloth mask is appropriate only as a last resort and when the supply of surgical masks is nonexistent.

If our employees choose to wear a cloth or homemade mask when PPE is not indicated, it's important that they understand that it is not considered PPE. Cloth masks are most appropriately used outside of health care settings (e.g., in public – per the president's April 2, 2020, address).

With that understanding, we've included information (below) about cloth or homemade masks.

### When is it appropriate to use homemade or cloth masks?

- In health care settings, only as a last resort when there are no PPE masks
- Some employees may feel more secure using a cloth mask when there is no indication for the use of PPE (surgical or N95 masks)
- Some may choose to use these homemade masks while out in public (non-healthcare settings)

The company does not currently stock homemade or cloth masks. There are opportunities to source these masks locally. There are many online sites with instructions for making homemade masks, and community service organizations often donate them.

### Helpful Hints for Using Cloth Masks

As with any reusable cloth item, be sure to replace and launder cloth masks often, and always if the mask becomes soiled or wet. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends cloth masks be brought to a temperature of at least 133 degrees Fahrenheit to kill the coronavirus when laundering. As always, a soapy scrub is recommended, and tumble-drying on high heat will help.

Cambridge University conducted a study in 2013 to determine the efficacy of cloth/homemade face masks against the flu virus. They found that surgical masks are, on average, up to three times more effective at filtering particles than cloth face masks, dependent on the type of fabric used. The top 5 fabrics that had the highest percentage of filtration effectiveness include:

1. Vacuum cleaner bags (which could be placed in between a doubled fabric face mask) are noted as the most effective non-PPE material (85.9% effective). In comparison, surgical masks are 89.5% effective.
2. Tea towel
3. Cotton fabric
4. Antimicrobial pillowcase
5. Regular pillowcase

Please also see the following pertinent links:

[PPE Conservation and Optimization](#)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/face-masks.html>

## PPE: Mask Selection Criteria

When should a surgical mask be used?

- When caring for individuals with suspected positive COVID-19 infection
- When coughing
- When in close contact with an individual who is coughing and unable to wear a mask
- When caring for individuals where there is a likelihood of splashed or sprayed body fluids
- When transporting individuals ill with respiratory symptoms who are unable to wear masks

What is an N95 mask and should I wear one?

The N95 mask is currently strictly reserved for healthcare workers performing aerosol-generating procedures like deep suctioning, tracheostomy care, or aerosolized medication administration. These masks are in very short supply and are not needed outside of healthcare settings. Health care workers caring for confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients who are symptomatic and likely to generate airborne sprays or splashes may need to wear N95 masks. Your Region Director of Clinical Practice will provide direction and support in these instances. Staff who use the N95 must be fit tested and receive training on whether and how to use them.