

Face Mask Selection and the Use of Cloth Face Masks

Many Government officials, from the local to national level, are recommending the routine use of face masks for everyone, including cloth and homemade masks, while out in public. Company policy requires the use of face coverings in all office and care delivery settings where social distancing is not possible (at least 6-feet between any person).

This communication provides information about cloth masks, clarifies that they are not to be considered Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for use in certain circumstances in care settings, and includes some information on when to use surgical and N95 masks.

We have started receiving shipments of PPE (surgical and N95) masks, although there are still nationwide shortages. 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 team members are 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 when needed for clinical reasons (e.g., providing care for persons infected with COVID-19). The use of a cloth mask is appropriate in most instances and can be used as a last resort in care settings when the supply of surgical masks is nonexistent.

Cloth masks are most appropriately used in office settings and most care delivery settings.

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

When is it appropriate to use homemade or cloth masks?

- In all office and in care settings, where PPE masks are not required
- While out in public (non-healthcare settings)

See our [policy](#) for more information.

Helpful Hints for Using Cloth Masks

As with any reusable cloth item, be sure to replace and launder cloth masks often, at least daily and always if the mask becomes soiled or wet. They should be laundered in hot water, a soapy scrub is recommended, and they should be tumble-dried on high heat.

Cambridge University conducted a study in 2013 to determine the efficacy of cloth/homemade face masks against the flu virus. For cloth masks, 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 coughing
- When in close contact with an individual who is ill or 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 or KN95 mask and should I wear one?

- An N95 mask provides a greater degree of filtration and is reserved for use only when providing direct care for persons infected with COVID-19, and when performing aerosol-generating procedures like deep suctioning, tracheostomy care, or aerosolized medication administration.
- Ensure that all team members who will use an N95 mask have received education on its use, including seal checks, donning and doffing procedures, conservation and storage for reuse.
- N95 masks typically require a “fit test” procedure, however fit testing has been suspended as there is currently a nationwide shortage of the supplies used to conduct the fit test.
- In order to conserve them, an N95 mask may be reused by the same person, for extended periods and for multiple days. It should be discarded when the physical integrity of the mask is no longer viable (e.g., soiled, wet, torn, elastics broken down, etc.).
 - In residential settings, a team member may wear the same mask throughout the day and for multiple days.
 - In visit-based settings (such as Home Health, Home Care and Hospice), a different N95 should be worn for each patient/client.
 - Masks should not be stored for reuse in air-tight containers (like a Ziplock bag). A paper bag should be used with the team member or patient/client name on the bag.
 - When removed, the mask should immediately be placed in the paper bag and not left on surfaces (table, countertop, etc.).

Your Region Director of Clinical Practice will provide direction and support in these instances.