


<b>HARVARD</b> CAMPUS SERVICES  <b>ENVIRONMENTAL          HEALTH &amp; SAFETY</b>	COVID-19  <u><b>Face Coverings: General Use</b></u>  Audience: Campus-Wide	
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## Introduction

Beginning March 14, 2022, general use face coverings are **optional** in most indoor spaces on Harvard University premises. Limited exceptions apply.

“General use” applies to faculty, staff, students, or visitors who must wear a face covering in accordance with current Harvard University policy for source control on Harvard University’s premises.

Face coverings provide source control and protect others from potentially infectious droplets that might be generated by the wearer. This is particularly important because people can spread the SARS-COV-2 virus without showing symptoms.



**All persons are welcome to continue wearing a mask of any type for their own protection, or to protect someone else, if they choose to do so. Nobody should be made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or marginalized because they choose to wear a mask.**

In limited situations when face coverings are required, anyone on campus not adhering to the University's face coverings policy may be asked to leave campus or be subject to administrative action.

## Requirement to Wear Face Coverings

Face coverings continue to be required in the following settings:

- In Harvard University Health Services (HUHS) and other healthcare facilities and other settings hosting vulnerable populations.
- Individuals who are completing isolation or quarantine should continue to wear masks when indoors for the full 10 days following their positive test or close contact, according to existing [Harvard University exposure, quarantine, and isolation protocols](#).

Unvaccinated individuals and people at higher risk for severe illness are encouraged to talk to their healthcare provider about whether they should wear a mask or respirator when indoors. The decision to wear a mask in settings where it is not required is a personal one, and it should be informed by the prevalence of cases in the community, your vaccination status, and your age/medical history.

**Please note that schools and Central Administration Units may continue to require masking in certain settings depending on their population, rates of infection, and other public health data.** In settings where face coverings continue to be required, individuals may remove their face covering while actively eating and drinking, unless otherwise prohibited within the space.

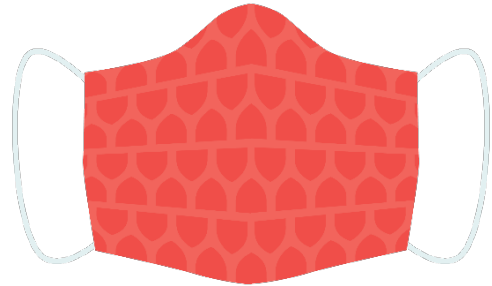
In certain settings, such as medical clinics and laboratories, additional personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g., N95 respirators) may be needed instead of general use face coverings.



## General Use Face Coverings



Disposable Face Covering



Cloth Face Covering

### Use Guidelines

*Including KN95, KF94, and surgical style masks.*

General use face coverings should:

- Be multi-layered and comprised of a minimum of two layers.

Cloth masks should block light when held up to a bright light source.

- Contain ear loops, ties, or otherwise fit snugly under the chin, on the sides of the face, and over the wearer's nose and mouth.

Look for masks that contain a nose wire to achieve a better fit.

- Allow for breathing without restriction.
- Be free of valves and similar openings.

A valve defeats the purpose of a face covering as it potentially allows virus particles to escape.

- Be changed or replaced when they become wet or soiled.
- Be laundered regularly and when soiled.

Please ensure that you wash your hands properly for 20 seconds with soap and water or use an approved, alcohol-based hand sanitizer before putting on or taking off your face covering.



PPE requirements sometimes supersede the need for general face coverings. Those who are issued PPE will receive the necessary training and equipment. For questions, see your manager/supervisor.

## Unacceptable Face Coverings

When face coverings are required per University policy, the following face coverings are **not acceptable**:

- Single layer cloth face coverings.
- Bandanas hanging loosely and not secured under the chin.
- Face coverings with highly elastic fabric that when stretched enlarges the spaces between the threads and does not adequately capture droplets.
- Face shields without the use of an approved face covering.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Are University departments still required to provide masks?

Schools and units throughout the University may continue to provide masks for those who choose to use them in indoors spaces.

### Can I wear my own N95 or similar filtering facepiece respirator to work on campus?

Yes, everyone is welcome to continue wearing a mask or respirator of any type for their own protection, or to protect someone else, if they choose to do so.

Individuals who wish to voluntarily use a respirator, rather than disposable procedure masks or cloth face coverings, are welcome to supply their own.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) respiratory protection standard allows for the voluntary use of FFRs like N95s without medical clearance or fit testing. To voluntarily wear a respirator you are required to complete the [Harvard University Respiratory Protection for Voluntary Users training](#).

In addition, it is important that you:



- Read and heed all instructions provided by the manufacturer on use, maintenance, cleaning and care, and warnings regarding the respirator's limitations.

Keep track of your respirator so that you do not mistakenly use someone else's respirator.

- Choose respirators certified for use to protect against the contaminant of concern.

NIOSH, part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, is the agency that certifies respirators. A label or statement of certification should appear on the respirator or respirator packaging. It will tell you what the respirator is designed for and how much it will protect you.

- Do not wear your respirator into atmospheres containing contaminants for which your respirator is not designed to protect against.

For example, a respirator designed to filter dust particles will not protect you against gases, vapors, or very small solid particles of fumes or smoke.

## Aside from settings where face coverings are still required, what are the requirements for unvaccinated individuals?

Harvard University does not have a separate or differing mask policy for unvaccinated individuals. Harvard community and non-Harvard community members who are unvaccinated should be instructed to talk to their healthcare provider about whether they should wear a mask or respirator when indoors.

To protect the privacy of our community and visitors, vaccination status is often unknown and the decision to wear a mask in settings where it is not required is a personal one.

The decision to mask should be informed by the prevalence of cases in the community, your vaccination status, and your age/medical history. We strongly encourage indoor masking for persons with greater health risks or concerns.

Masks continue to be highly effective in reducing risk of transmission regardless of vaccination status.



## Why was universal masking considered necessary as source control but now we're told masking is voluntary?

When COVID-19 first appeared in 2020, our immune systems were naïve to the virus and we had to rely on community-wide measures, such as universal masking. Now we have a community that is highly vaccinated (around 98% vaccinated) and with some prior infection, so Harvard's community-wide immunity is significant.

The evidence is that those who are vaccinated and boosted have a high degree of protection from medically significant disease, regardless of what others around them choose to do.

With the current low community level, and consistent with Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Centers for disease Control and Prevention guidance, we feel confident letting our community make its own decision about masking in most circumstances.

High quality masks, such as surgical masks which are effective in health care settings, remain available on campus and those who want to wear these types of masks may do so in addition to consulting with their physician if they have special concerns about their immune status.

## References

- [CDC: Your Guide to Masks](#), Retrieved March 4, 2022
- [Massachusetts: COVID-19 Mask Requirements](#), Retrieved March 7, 2022
- [ASTM Standards for Medical Face Masks](#), Retrieved January 13, 2022