

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

General use face coverings are recommended by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and required on Harvard University premises.

“General use” applies to faculty, staff, students, or visitors who must wear a face covering 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.

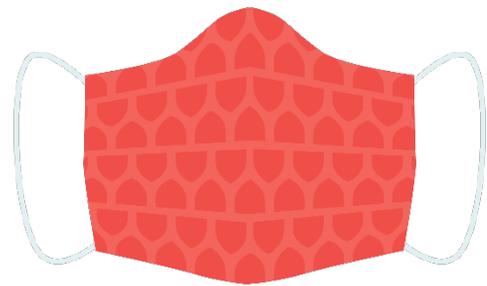
Unless specifically cleared due to medical or other reasons, anyone on campus not properly wearing a suitable face covering may be asked to leave campus or be subject to administrative action.

Those who cannot wear a face covering, for medical or other reasons, are encouraged to work with their manager and Human Resources to identify alternative options.

## General Use Face Coverings



*Disposable Face Covering*



*Cloth Face Covering*

## Use Guidelines

General use face coverings should:

- Be multi-layered and comprised of a minimum of two layers.
- 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.
- 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 with detergent and machine dried (if cloth).

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.

Personal protective equipment (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.

Additional information on cloth face coverings can be found in [Face Coverings/Masks/Respirators: Selection and Procurement Cloth Face Coverings Supplement](#).

## Unacceptable Face Coverings

Some face coverings have been shown to be less effective at containing droplets.

The following face coverings are **not acceptable**:

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

## Requirement to Wear Face Coverings

Face coverings serve several purposes:

- Source control to diminish the abundance, size, and velocity of droplets, exhaled by the mask-wearer that may otherwise expose other persons.
- Source control to reduce the wearer's expelled droplets from contaminating surfaces.
- Some personal protection to lower the quantity of droplets inhaled by the user.



Note that face coverings are not considered to be PPE (with the exception of those certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) or foreign agencies as allowed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)<sup>1</sup> during the COVID-19 pandemic).

As such, all Harvard University community members, including vendors and visitors, are required to wear a cloth or disposable face covering whenever they are indoors (unless they are in their own private residence or room with the door closed), and when outside.<sup>2</sup>

Those living in suites with unrelated roommates should wear their face coverings when outside of their private bedroom and while visiting shared rooms within the suite.

Neither face coverings nor most medical grade surgical masks protect the wearer from all infectious droplets and aerosols generated by other nearby people, which is why **face coverings must always be used in conjunction with social distancing**.

When more protective PPE is needed (e.g., when clinicians conduct procedures such as intubation in close proximity to infected patients), N95 respirators are typically required.

In addition to state and local requirements, the following exceptions for use may also apply:

- When actively eating or drinking in approved or designated areas.
- In your personal bedroom, with the door closed.
- When accessing a shared bathroom (when no one else is in the room) for the purpose of tooth brushing or other grooming, and while taking a shower.
- When in your personal, family residence.

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<sup>1</sup> [OSHA: Enforcement Guidance for Use of Respiratory Protection Equipment Certified under Standards of Other Countries or Jurisdictions During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Pandemic](#), Retrieved February 12, 2021

<sup>2</sup> [Harvard University: Coronavirus Health and Wellbeing](#), Retrieved October 14, 2020



- While in a private office not accessed by others with the door closed.

Please note that school or department policies, including food service operations and research environments, may be more restrictive or have specific requirements.

Work tasks requiring additional protective measures will supersede this guidance.

## Additional Face Covering Types

**Surgical/procedure masks** have become more readily available.

Masks that are rated as **medical grade** should only be worn by medical professionals or those with specified job-related safety protocols.

The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) specifies performance standards for surgical masks that account primarily for the resistance of the mask material to body fluids typical in healthcare and dental settings. Such fluid resistance is not needed for general use by non-healthcare workers in an office or laboratory setting.

Disposable, surgical style masks that are **not rated** may be used as a general use face covering.

## **N95 and Similar Filtering Facepiece Respirators**

An N95 is a type of filtering facepiece respirator (FFR) that relies on a tight fit to filter particles in the air.

An N95 may be appropriate when someone is working in close contact to aerosol-generating procedures and exposure cannot be controlled through other engineering controls such as by ventilation or administrative controls.

Examples of these types of the activities that **may** require a respirator at Harvard University include:

- Dentistry/dental hygiene
- Certain medical procedures with unmasked patients generating aerosols
- Medical students in clinical rotations
- Emergency medical technicians (EMT) and laboratory work with live SARS virus



A user seal check is required each time a respirator is donned and necessitates a clean-shaven face to enable a tight seal. It can be difficult to tolerate wearing a respirator for an extended time.

Respirators with exhalation valves may not be used to ease breathing resistance because they are not protective of others in the environment. Not everyone is able to wear a respirator because of medical conditions that may be made worse when breathing through a respirator.

Every person required to wear a respirator of any type must follow Harvard University's Respiratory Protection Program. In this case, you must take the respiratory protection training, obtain a medical evaluation, and be fit-tested.

Note that if you are required to wear a respirator as a medical, dental, or other frontline worker, you may use surgical N95s approved by NIOSH and the FDA<sup>3</sup>, or N95s, KN95s, and similar respirators approved by the FDA under Emergency Use Authorizations (EUA) during this pandemic.

For more information on the different contexts for use of face coverings/masks, surgical masks, and respirators see [FDA: N95 Respirators, Surgical Masks, and Face Masks](#).

## Face Covering Frequently Asked Questions

**I have my own N95 or similar filtering facepiece respirator. Can I wear that to work on campus?**

It is important to recognize that, in combination with other COVID-19 control measures used at Harvard University, a tight-fitting, multi-layered face covering provides source control that protects people around you and has been very effective in preventing transmission.

Those who are not a part of Harvard University's Respiratory Protection Program are asked to reserve surgical N95s approved by NIOSH and the FDA, or N95s, KN95s, and similar respirators approved by the FDA under EUAs for healthcare and other workers who need them to safely perform their work.

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<sup>3</sup> [FDA: Personal Protective Equipment EUAs](#), Retrieved February 12, 2021



However, OSHA's respiratory protection standard does allow the voluntary use of FFRs like N95s or KN95s without medical clearance or fit testing. To voluntarily wear a respirator, you are required to complete the [Harvard Training Portal's Respiratory Protection for Voluntary Users training](#).

In addition, it is important for you to:

- 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 of the U.S. 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.

**I have heard some news reports say that it is better to wear two masks simultaneously. Does Harvard University recommend this too? May I wear two masks simultaneously while on campus?**

An appropriate, tight-fitting, and multi-layered face covering provides source control that protects people around you, and has been very effective in preventing transmission in combination with other control measures at Harvard University (see [Use Guidelines](#) for more information).

If an individual chooses to wear multiple face coverings, it is important that at least one of their face coverings complies with [use guidelines](#).



For more detailed information on safely improving the fit and filtration, please see CDC's latest guidance on ways to increase your mask protection while not impeding respiration.<sup>4</sup>

Please note that school or department policies, including research environments, may be more restrictive or have specific requirements.

Work tasks requiring additional protective measures will supersede this guidance.

## Why are N95s and KN95s not being required for more activities at Harvard University?

There have been extraordinary efforts to reduce close contact or high risk activities and conditions which one might find while circulating in non-Harvard University establishments (e.g., crowded food/drinking establishments and stores, poor adherence to mask-wearing guidance, engaging in close contact activities in contradiction to public health recommendations, etc.).

At Harvard University, FFRs such as N95s are only needed in certain circumstances when close contact with high-risk, aerosol generating procedures cannot be eliminated.

Off-campus communities and establishments and places of work may have differing policies.

Harvard University's abundant prevention and control strategies include:

- Universal training
- Reliable masking
- Well-maintained and well-characterized ventilation systems
- Extensive signage and behavioral cues
- High cadence testing
- Stringent cleaning and disinfection protocols
- Daily Crimson Clear attestations
- Prompt contact tracing

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<sup>4</sup> [CDC: Improve the Fit and Filtration of Your Mask to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19](#), Retrieved February 12, 2021



- Operational modifications  
that enable physical distancing

These measures have successfully minimized the COVID-19 positivity rate on campus.

## References

- [ASTM: Standards for Medical Face Masks and Protective Clothing](#), Retrieved May 26, 2020
- [CDC: Important Information About Your Cloth Face Coverings](#), Retrieved May 26, 2020
- [Massachusetts: Wear a Mask in Public](#), Retrieved May 26, 2020