Introduction

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

Face coverings provide source control and protect others from possible 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

Option 1: Disposable Non-Surgical Face Covering

Option 2: Reusable 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 be able to 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 since it allows the wearer to breath out potentially contaminated respiratory droplets).
- Be changed out/replaced when they become wet or soiled.
- Be laundered with detergent and machine dried (if cloth).

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

Some face coverings have been shown to be less effective at containing droplets, and their use is discouraged on campus. These include:

- 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.

**Requirement to Wear Face Coverings**

Face coverings serve two purposes:

• Source control to prevent others from inhaling droplets.

• Source control to prevent the wearer's droplets from cross contaminating surfaces.

As such, it is expected that Harvard University personnel 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.¹

Please ensure that you wash your hands properly for 20 seconds with soap and water before putting on or taking off your face covering.

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.

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

• When actively eating or drinking.

• 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 toothbrushing or other grooming, and while taking a shower.

• When in your personal, family residence.

¹ [Harvard University: Coronavirus Health and Wellbeing](https://ehs.harvard.edu/coronavirus), Retrieved October 14, 2020
• While in a private office not accessed by others with the door closed.

**Additional Face Covering Types**

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

Personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements sometimes supersede the need for general face coverings; those who are issued PPE will receive the necessary training, information, and equipment. For questions, see your manager/supervisor.

Surgical/procedural masks are medical grade masks and should only be worn by medical professionals or those with specified job-related safety protocols.

Massachusetts and CDC guidance discourages the use of medical grade surgical masks and N95 respirators by non-healthcare workers, unless required for a specific job function, due to the shortage of those items.

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.

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 are always 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.

**References**

- [ASTM: Standards for Medical Face Masks and Protective Clothing](https://www.astm.org/), Retrieved May 26, 2020
- [CDC: Important Information About Your Cloth Face Coverings](https://www.cdc.gov), Retrieved May 26, 2020
- [Massachusetts: Wear a Mask in Public](https://www.mass.gov), Retrieved May 26, 2020