

Guidelines for using Face Masks in Laboratories and Shops

Per University policy, everyone must wear face masks over their mouths and noses in all indoor spaces on university property, including laboratories and shops, to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Face masks do not replace required job-specific personal protective equipment (PPE), such as medical/procedure masks, face shields or respirators.

According to the CDC, it is most important to wear a well-fitting mask that fits snugly but comfortably against the side of the face and allows for breathing without restriction.

Face Masks/Coverings

Face coverings or face masks are safe to wear in laboratories and shops if good work hygiene practices are followed and masks are changed if they are contaminated.

Ensure an adequate supply of masks so they can be replaced if they become contaminated inside the lab or shop. Supplying disposable masks will reduce the potential for reuse.

Lab personnel should not wear a cloth face covering when manipulating hazardous materials (chemical, biological and radiological substances). Disposable face coverings, such as surgical masks, are recommended when handling such materials for easy disposal if contaminated or at the end of the day.

When using reusable or disposable face coverings, review material of construction and check it against the types of materials and hazards that may be encountered in the workplace for compatibility. Choose materials best suited for the hazard.

- When working with open flames, pyrophoric or water-reactive materials, or flammable chemicals in the presence of an ignition source use face masks made from 100% cotton or flame resistant non permeable materials.

Disposable/Surgical Masks

- Use a disposable/surgical mask when working with hazardous chemicals, radioactive materials, biosafety level 2 microorganisms, chemical or biological toxins, or highly reactive materials.
- Discard the surgical mask at the end of each work shift. Surgical masks must only be worn for one day.
- If any hazardous materials contact the surgical mask, it must be disposed of immediately and replaced with a clean mask.
- A surgical mask does not replace any other recommended or required PPE for your duties or work space such as goggles, face shields, or respirators, and it should not interfere with the fit or function of PPE.
- Adjust your surgical mask and ensure it fits properly, so that it does not obstruct your vision. Twist or cross ear-loops to tighten the mask, if needed.
- Do not touch your surgical mask with gloved hands. Remove your gloves before taking your mask off.
- Discard and replace surgical masks if they become damaged, soiled, or wet.
- Dispose of surgical masks *before leaving the lab*, to minimize the potential for cross-contamination outside of the laboratory.

Cloth Face Coverings

- Review the CDC guidance for appropriate use and types of cloth face coverings: [CDC Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#).
- Cloth face coverings are not appropriate in some work environments. They cannot be adequately decontaminated, and therefore should not be worn in environments where the face covering may become contaminated by infectious materials or other hazardous substances.
- Individuals should not wear a reusable face covering when conducting research at the laboratory bench/fume hood/biosafety cabinet with hazardous chemicals, biohazards or radioactive materials.
- Do not wear a cloth face covering when using open flames or flammable materials.
- Do not use tie behind face coverings in areas where there are moving parts or equipment or in tight spaces where strings could get caught or become entangled in machinery.

Other Considerations

- Face shields are used when splash hazards are present and do not replace the use of a face covering.
- Wear a face shield in addition to a face mask when working with pyrophorics, flammable solvents (>500 mL), corrosives, incompatible chemicals such as strong oxidizers like nitric acid, or using an open flame.
- If face shields are shared, ensure they are cleaned and disinfected between users.

Eyewear Fog When Using a Face Mask

To prevent the eyewear from fogging up when wearing a face mask, try the following:

- Immediately before wearing a face mask, wash your glasses with soapy water and shake off the excess. Then, let the glasses air dry or gently dry off the lenses with a soft tissue before putting them back on.
- Improve the fit of the mask by bending the metal strip to your nose and cheeks and adjust the straps for a tighter seal. For ear-loop style masks, twist or cross the ear-loops for a tighter fit.
- Pull mask up and rest your glasses on top of the mask.
- Place a folded tissue paper horizontally across the nose underneath the mask to absorb moisture and reduce fogging.
- Tape the mask across the bridge of your nose and across your cheeks. You can use any type of athletic, or medical adhesive tape.
- Use a commercial anti-fog solution or wipe for the eyewear or purchase anti-fogging safety eyewear.