

Face Masks

General Information

Recent studies show that a significant portion of individuals with COVID-19 lack symptoms (“asymptomatic”) and that even those who eventually develop symptoms (“pre-symptomatic”) can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. The virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity—for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing—even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is advising the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus from transmitting it to others.

It is critical to emphasize that maintaining 6-foot social distancing remains the most important measure to slow the spread of the virus at work and in your community. Other important measures include:

- hand washing (with soap & water for 20 seconds) or use of hand sanitizers when unable to wash hands,
- not touching your face,
- coughing or sneezing into your elbow/arm or single-use tissue (promptly disposed in trash receptacle),
- daily cleaning of frequently touched surfaces,
- staying home if you are sick.

When you are unable to maintain distancing or when you will be in areas where social distancing is more difficult, wearing a cloth mask may aid in preventing the spread of virus.

It is important to understand that the cloth face coverings or “masks” are not a substitute for the surgical masks needed in healthcare settings or personal protective equipment (PPE) such as N95 respirators. They **do not** offer the wearer adequate protection from airborne pathogens. PPE is in short supply and should be reserved for healthcare professionals and others that must come in frequent and close contact with those that are sick.



K-State Essential Employees

Use of a cloth or disposable mask is recommended for K-State employees that are considered essential personnel, particularly employees who are unable to maintain the recommended 6 foot distance from others at *all times* during the course of performing essential work functions. Depending on your work activities, wearing a mask may be required. Check with your supervisor or Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) for guidance.

If you do not have a cloth or disposable mask for work, you may obtain one from EHS depending on availability. Call 785-532-5856 for details. New, unused cloth masks provided to employees by EHS have been professionally laundered and minimally handled prior to distribution. Disposable masks available from EHS are not intended for use in sterile environments and do not provide a fluid barrier.

If you are a healthcare worker or other employee with potential exposure to sick patients or pathogen contaminated areas, a cloth mask may be insufficient protection. [Contact EHS](#) to coordinate a risk assessment and/or for information about required personal protective equipment (PPE) such as respirators. Use of respirators, including N95s, requires medical approval, training and fit testing to ensure your safety and health. Visit www.k-state.edu/safety/occupational/respiratory-protection/ for information and forms.

Cloth Mask Care and Safe Use

You should wash your cloth mask daily and whenever it becomes soiled. A washing machine and dryer is adequate for cleaning. Do not spray your mask with disinfectants or harsh chemicals. Discard the mask if it has become damaged.

A cloth mask should:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the face
- completely cover your mouth and nose (figure 1)
- be secured with elastic ear loops (fig 1) or ties (fig 2)
- **allow unrestricted breathing**



Figure 1
CDC image

A mask should **not** be worn by:

- children under 2
- anyone that has trouble breathing
- anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or unable to remove the mask without assistance

Ideally, cloth masks are made from high thread count cotton with 2-3 layers at cross grains. However, many materials and style of homemade face masks are recommended by the CDC, including makeshift face coverings made from bandanas and rubber bands, or from t-shirts. Visit CDC for information and tutorials on fashioning masks for your personal use:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html

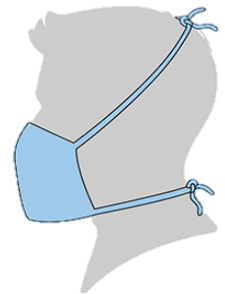


Figure 2
CDC image

Disposable Masks

Disposable masks are single use, meaning they should be used once and disposed in the trash. Essential personnel should discard and replace disposable face masks at least:

- at each break and shift change
- when they become moist, wet, soiled, damaged, or misshapen
- after any encounter or contact with sick individuals (each suspected exposure event).

Healthcare workers should follow their unit infection control plan.

Donning and Doffing (Putting On and Taking Off Your Mask)

- Wash hands with soap and water or apply hand sanitizer before putting mask on.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, mouth or the mask while wearing it.
- Wash hands with soap and water or apply hand sanitizer before taking the mask off.
- Do not touch the face of the mask. Remove by handling only the ties or loops of the mask.
- Wash hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer after handling the used mask.

Training on COVID-19 and the differences of face masks types is available online at www.k-state.edu/safety/covid-19/

K-State COVID-19 updates and resources are available at: www.k-state.edu/covid-19/

For additional information about the novel coronavirus visit the [CDC](#), [KDHE](#) or [Riley County Health Department](#) websites.