

## COVID-19 Preparedness & Response

# Frequently Asked Questions for NCHC Employees

April 1, 2020

## Face Masks

### Q: Which mask should I wear – Surgical Mask or N95?

A: For most patient encounters at NCHC we should be utilizing Surgical Masks. N95 respirators should be reserved for direct care of suspected or known positive COVID-19 patients or for staff that are immunocompromised. N95 masks should also be utilized in all Aerosol generating procedures (e.g., CPR, endotracheal intubation, non-invasive ventilation, etc...).

### Q: Can I reuse my mask?

A: Yes. There are two different methods for reusing masks: extended & re-use. Extended use of facemasks is the practice of wearing the same facemask for repeated close contact encounters with several different patients, without removing the facemask between patient encounters. Re-use is the practice of using the same facemask for multiple encounters with different patients but removing it after each encounter. Depending on your location, you may use both.

- HCP must take care not to touch their facemask. If they touch or adjust their facemask they must immediately perform hand hygiene.
- A mask should not be worn for more than 5 days of use, and will likely need replacement before then
- Not all face masks are suitable for reuse. Facemasks that fasten to the provider via ties may not be able to be undone without tearing and should be considered only for extended use, rather than re-use. Facemasks with elastic ear hooks may be more suitable for re-use
- The facemask should be removed and discarded if soiled, damaged, Integrity is lost (eg: visible rips and tears or too easy or hard to breathe through), or it is hard to breathe through.
- Surgical masks should be discarded if used in direct care of a COVID-19 positive patient upon leaving the covid-19 positive treatment area.

### Q: How do I know if my mask is soiled?

A: If your mask is visibly dirty or has been directly sneezed or coughed on it is considered soiled.

### Q: How do I store my facemask?

A: Per CDC guidelines, facemasks should be carefully folded so that the outer surface is held inward and against itself to reduce contact with the outer surface during storage. The folded mask can be stored between uses in a clean sealable paper bag. Label the paper bag with your name, and store it in a dry, safe location.

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## Q: Do I have to be fit tested for a N95 respirator?

**A:** Staff working on select units will be fit tested, however, all staff wearing an N95 mask should perform a self-seal check regardless of whether they have been fit tested or not. After donning an N95 respirator, perform a self-seal check to assist the mask performance. Continue to adjust the mask to minimize evidence of air leakage.

## Q: How do I perform a user seal check for an N95 respirator?

**A:** To perform a Negative Pressure self-seal check take the following steps: - Place the N95 respirator on your face and inhale. - If the facepiece remains in its slightly collapsed condition and no inward leakage of air is detected, - the tightness of the N95 respirator is considered satisfactory.

## Q: Must I wear an N95 respirator when caring for COVID-19 positive patients?

**A:** Although they are preferred when caring for COVID-19 positive patients, the CDC does allow for use of Surgical Masks, when combined with a full complement of PPE, in that setting. A surgical mask used in the treatment of a COVID-19 positive patient should not be worn outside of a COVID-19 positive designated treatment area.

## Q: Can I use a KN95 respirator?

**A:** According to the CDC, KN95 respirators are expected to be suitable alternatives to N95 respirators during the COVID-19 response when supplies are short.

## Q: Can I wear a homemade mask?

**A:** Homemade masks are not considered Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and should only be used in combination with another form of facial PPE. When worn over a surgical mask, homemade masks may help protect surgical masks from becoming soiled -- but may also make breathing more difficult or lead to greater warmth and accumulation of moisture within the mask.

At this time, we do not recommend wearing a homemade mask over a surgical mask or a respirator when used in a COVID-19 positive setting. Do not attempt to take home or wash a homemade face mask after use in a COVID-19 Positive setting. If used in such a setting the homemade facemask should be discarded with the rest of your PPE.

## Q: How do I care for/clean a facemask?

**A: Surgical/Procedure Masks:** Do NOT attempt to clean a single use facemask Do NOT use cleaning solutions on your mask (eg. Alcohol or Bleach) as it will damage the integrity of the mask

**Homemade Masks and Headbands:** Use normal laundry detergent according to washing machine instructions and dry thoroughly using the warmest temperatures possible. There is no need to use alcohol or bleach – soap and hot water is best.

**Q: Can I draw on my face mask?**

**A:** No, drawing on your face mask increases the risk of damaging the mask.



**Q: Can I wear a headband with a button on it?**

**A:** Yes, you may wear a headband with buttons on it and secure your mask straps to the button.

**Q: Can I take my mask home?**

**A:** No, surgical masks and N95 respirators must be maintained and stored at NCHC to protect their integrity. However, homemade masks should be taken home and cleaned according to the recommendations above prior to next use.

**Q: Why are we reusing PPE?**

**A:** We are actively engaged in monitoring available resources. During this unprecedented time and circumstance, we need to take different approaches to protect our team members while maintaining the ability to provide coverage and care for those we serve.