

COVID-19 Preparedness & Response

Frequently Asked Questions for NCHC Employees

July 22, 2020

Face Masks

Q: Which NCHC staff members should wear masks, and when should they be worn?

A: ALL NCHC staff are required to wear a surgical face mask while at work, in public NCHC areas such as hallways, corridors, lobbies, shared workspaces and/or in any NCHC related patient care activities within facilities or out in the community. Masks may be removed while in private offices that are not a part of direct patient care activities. If you share a room or a cubicle space or other employees enter that space, a mask is required at all times. When you are approaching the building or awaiting screening, a mask is required.

Q: If I have to leave my face mask at work, can I walk to my program to don my mask?

A: No. A surgical mask or cloth face covering are required and acceptable when you are arriving to work, screening and walking to your work area. Always keep your mask on during the screening process. When you arrive to the designated work area, non-public space or office, you may then switch to your required surgical mask. Cloth masks are not acceptable to wear during the normal work day. Surgical masks are required.

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 and re-use.

Extended use of face masks is the practice of wearing the same face mask for repeated close contact encounters with several different patients, without removing the face mask between patient encounters. **Re-use** is the practice of using the same face mask for multiple encounters with different patients but removing it after each encounter.

Depending on your location, you may use both.

- Healthcare Providers (HCP) must take care not to touch their face mask. If they touch or adjust their face mask 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.

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- Not all face masks are suitable for reuse. Face masks 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. Face masks with elastic ear hooks may be more suitable for re-use.
- The face mask should be removed and discarded if soiled, damaged, integrity is lost (eg: visible rips and tears), or it is too easy or hard to breathe through.
- Surgical face masks should be discarded if used in direct care of a COVID-19 positive patient upon leaving the COVID-19 positive treatment area.

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.

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 replace a soiled face mask?

A: Face masks, and paper bags which will be used for their storage, will be handed out to all employees at the beginning of the week. If your mask becomes soiled or you do not work a traditional work week, you may request a new mask at any time. Please discuss with your manager on how to best to locate new masks and paper storage bags.

Q: How do I store my face mask?

A: Per CDC guidelines, face masks 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.

Q: Can I wear a homemade or obtained face cover (sometimes referred to as homemade face mask) while at work?

A: The CDC now recommends everyone in the community wear a face cover while in public spaces in the community (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>). We do encourage everyone to follow this recommendation, but homemade or purchased face covers (homemade face masks) are not considered Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and should not be used as the only respiratory protection while on the premises or engaged in NCHC related work activities, except if used as part of reporting to, or leaving from, work.

When worn over a surgical mask, face covers 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 face cover 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 cover after use if used in a COVID-19 positive setting. If used in such a setting, the homemade face cover should be discarded with the rest of your disposable PPE.

Q: How do I care for/clean a face mask?

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

Homemade Covers 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 buttons on it?

A: Yes, you may wear a headband with buttons on it and secure your surgical mask straps to the buttons. We ask that the headband be washed according to the directions above after each work day, and headbands should not be used with N95 masks or respirators in Covid19 positive patient care or COVID-19 designated areas.

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, face covers (homemade masks) should be taken home and cleaned according to the recommendations above prior to next use.

Everyone is encouraged to wear face covers while not at work, and you may take a face cover you made or obtained home freely if it has not been used in care activities with COVID-19 positive patients or in COVID-19 designated service areas. Cloth face coverings are available to employees and families at no cost. Please ask your manager.

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 respirator 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 respirator's performance. Continue to adjust the respirator 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 face piece 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.