

Which Mask for Which Task?

*COVID-19 Prevention at Work:
When to Use Face Coverings and Respirators*



Division of Occupational Safety and Health



www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health



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Washington State Department of
Labor & Industries

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Introduction

Face coverings and masks are important tools in preventing the spread of coronavirus. Used in conjunction with social distancing and physical barriers, they can help protect workers and the public.

This publication explains when workers should use cloth face coverings and masks to protect others from the coronavirus, and when workers are required to use respirators to protect themselves.

This information supplements the technical guidance in *Washington Coronavirus Hazard Considerations for Employers (except hospitals/clinics)*, issued in May 2020, and available online at www.Lni.wa.gov/agency/outreach/novel-coronavirus-outbreak-covid-19-resources.

Both documents set out the minimum level of face coverings required if there are no other feasible measures to prevent spreading the virus.

The information in this document does not apply to workers treating active COVID-19 patients in hospitals and clinics. Those workers must follow Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for selecting respirators and other personal protective equipment (PPE). For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html.

Why wear a face covering, mask, or respirator?

You may be required to wear a face covering, mask, or respirator at work to lessen the risk for spreading the coronavirus.

The virus can spread into the air on tiny particles of saliva when an infected person breathes, talks, coughs, or sneezes. Many people who are infected don't have noticeable symptoms (asymptomatic), so they might spread the virus to others without knowing it.

Cloth face coverings help keep particles you exhale from escaping into the air, but don't effectively filter out particles already in the air from others.

Masks are usually more protective than cloth face coverings.

Respirators offer a higher level of protection than face coverings and masks because they also prevent wearers from inhaling particles already in the air.

All three provide some protection when a person coughs and sneezes near you; some that are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provide more protection against coughs and sneezes.

Is social distancing less important if I wear a face covering?

No. Face coverings, masks, and respirators do not replace social distancing. In addition to staying six feet away from others, you must still practice frequent handwashing, frequent cleaning and/or disinfecting of surfaces and tools, and follow other critical safety measures required by the Washington Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) (www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/topics/coronavirus#requirements-and-policies) and the Governor's guidelines (www.governor.wa.gov/issues/issues/covid-19-resources/covid-19-reopening-guidance-businesses-and-workers) to keep you safe from the coronavirus.

Negligible Risk

Cloth face coverings may be required in some circumstances when the risk for transmission is “negligible” (very low).

For example, you don’t need to wear a face covering if you work or drive alone. However, a cloth face covering is required if you work outdoors or in a building while around, but separate, from several other people, and only need to pass within six feet of them once or twice a day.

Examples of negligible-risk jobs:

- Telecommuters who are the sole occupant in an office with a door.
- Small landscaping crews of three or four workers who drive alone and work outdoors apart from each other all day.
- A crane operator isolated in an enclosed cab.
- Delivery drivers who have no face-to-face interaction with others when they pick up or drop off packages.



This is a home-made reusable cloth face covering for use in negligible- or low-risk situations. It provides some protection when a person coughs or sneezes near you.

*This unaltered photo provided by author Doc James,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HomemadeFacemask.jpg>*

Low Risk

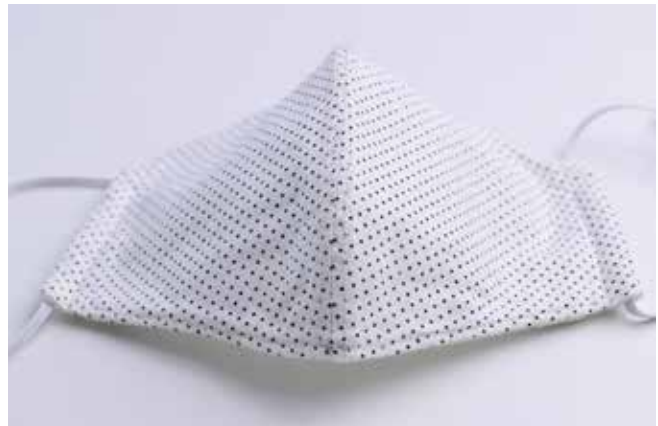
A reusable cloth face covering is required when risk for transmission is low.

Risk for transmission is low when you work around or travel with others and you stay at least six feet apart, except for briefly passing by others up to several times a day.

Risk is also considered low when one or two workers provide personal services to healthy clients who also wear a cloth face covering.

Examples of low-risk workplaces and jobs with low-risk activities:

- Light manufacturing facilities that are set up to keep workers separated while they operate machinery and perform other tasks.
- Custodial staff who work after hours and do not clean up after known COVID-19 cases.
- One or two healthy workers in a room providing haircuts or other personal services to clients who also wear a face covering.
- Waiters at restaurants and cafes with curbside pick-up services only.
- Mechanics working on vehicles at repair shops.



This is a home-made reusable cloth face covering for use in negligible- or low-risk situations. It provides some protection when a person coughs or sneezes near you.

Medium Risk

Disposable masks are required when risk for transmission is medium. Examples of disposable masks include dust masks used for hobbies, but not approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH); surgical-style masks not approved by the FDA; and masks such as KN90s or KN95s approved in other countries.

Risk for transmission is considered medium when you stay at least six feet away from others except for several times throughout the day when the six-foot distance is broken for several minutes and prevention measures such as physical barriers aren't feasible.

Risk is also considered medium when three to six people work in a room providing personal services to healthy clients who wear a cloth face covering.

Examples of medium-risk jobs and medium-risk activities:

- Commercial fishing crews.
- Field workers being transported to a nearby planting site.
- Grocery-store-produce stockers who work during store hours around customers.
- Manicurists working with clients wearing cloth face coverings.
- Kitchen workers in restaurants.
- Ride-service drivers who only pick up masked passengers.
- Transit operators.



This is a non-NIOSH approved disposable mask for use in medium-risk situations. You wear this to protect yourself and others from saliva particles in the air and it offers some protection when a person coughs or sneezes near you. Your employer will inform you about proper use and care.

*This unaltered photo provided by author byrev,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cone-88240_1920.jpg*

High Risk

Respirators are required when risk for transmission is high.

Respirators for high-risk activities must be approved by NIOSH (or by an equivalent approval body from outside the United States). Examples include: elastomeric (rubber-like) half- or full-facepiece respirators with cartridges, tight or loose-fitting powered-air purifying respirators (PAPRs) with particulate cartridges, and filtering facepiece N-, R-, or P-95s to P100s (when supplies allow).

Risk for transmission is considered high when you work or travel within three feet of others for more than 10 minutes an hour, many times a day and other prevention measures aren't feasible.

Risk is also considered high when you:

- Clean and sanitize areas recently occupied by a person with known COVID-19 illness.
- Provide services in residences of clients with known COVID-19 illness.
- Perform procedures that aerosolize saliva, mucous, or secretions from eyes; or that cause increased or forced breathing, coughs, sneezes, or yawning.

Examples of high-risk activities:

- Working with multiple people in a small room, confined space, vehicle or other small space where saliva particles can accumulate in the air.
- Using an ultrasonic scaler or air and water syringe on clients in a dentist office.
- Administering medication via nebulizers.
- Performing spirometry or coaching clients on deep or forced breathing exercises.
- Providing in-home maintenance or pet euthanasia services to a masked client with known or potential COVID-19 illness.



This is a NIOSH-approved elastomeric half-facepiece respirator with reusable cartridges. Use this in high-risk situations to protect yourself from saliva particles in the air. It also offers some protection when a person coughs or sneezes near you.

This unaltered photo provided by author Haragayato, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HEPA_half-face_respirator.jpg

Examples of high-risk jobs:

- Custodial staff who clean up after known COVID-19 cases.
- Dentists and dental hygienists.
- Mortuary services.
- Veterinarians who provide in-home pet euthanasia.

Extremely High Risk

When risk for transmission is extremely high you must wear NIOSH-approved N95s, half- or full-facepiece elastomeric respirators with cartridges, or PAPRs (Powered Air-Purifying Respirators) with cartridges; FDA-approved N95s or surgical masks; or other respirators with NIOSH-equivalent approval.

You must also use additional personal protective equipment (PPE), including:

- Goggles or face shields to protect your eyes or face during face-to-face interactions.
- Surgical masks or other types of masks (as supplies allow) for the client to wear, when feasible, during face-to-face tasks for as long as possible while you are present.

Transmission risk is extremely high when you work in residential or non-hospital or clinic settings within six feet of people with COVID-19. You may come into close contact with their exhaled or expelled saliva, mucous, or tears that may contain the coronavirus.

Transmission risk is also extremely high when your work brings you into direct contact with peoples' mouth, nose, or eyes, even if they appear to be healthy or asymptomatic.

Examples of extremely high-risk jobs:

- Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs).
- Long-term care facility workers who care for clients ill with COVID-19.
- Occupational or physical therapists providing therapy to quarantined clients.

Examples of extremely high-risk tasks:

- Conducting visual eye exams or tonometry.
- Taking mouth or nose swab samples at drive-up testing stations.



This is a NIOSH-approved N95 filtering-facepiece respirator. Use this, or a more protective respirator in high- or extremely-high risk situations to protect yourself from saliva particles in the air. It also provides some protection when a person coughs or sneezes near you, but isn't liquid-resistant like an FDA-approved surgical mask or N95 respirator.

This unaltered photo provided by author Banej, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3M_N95_Part particulate_Respirator.JPG

Use and Care

When respirators are required, your employer must provide NIOSH-approved (or equivalent approval from a country outside the United States) respirators and follow requirements to ensure you receive a medical evaluation, fit test, training, maintenance, storage, and other necessary provisions as required by the Respirators rule in Chapter 296-842 WAC (www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-rules/rules-by-chapter/?chapter=842) to ensure effective protection from your respirator.

If you will use an N95 or other tight-fitting respirator, you must be clean shaven so that the respirator can form a reliably tight face seal. PAPRs with loose-fitting hoods do not require fit-testing and may be an alternative for bearded workers.

Workplace Discrimination

It is against the law for employers to fire, demote, or otherwise retaliate against a worker they suspect of exercising safety and health rights. Those worker rights include raising safety and health concerns to their employer, participating in union activities concerning safety and health matters, filing a safety and health complaint or participating in an L&I Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) investigation. Workers have 30 days to file a complaint with DOSH and/or with the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). www.Lni.wa.gov/workers-rights/workplace-complaints/discrimination-in-the-workplace.

Resources

Call a consultant near you at 1-800-547-8367 or email DOSHConsultation@Lni.wa.gov for free, confidential help. www.Lni.wa.gov/DOSHConsultation.

The DOSH coronavirus website (www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/topics/coronavirus) includes resources from the CDC and OSHA.

Washington State Department of Health:
www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus.

Upon request, foreign language support and formats for persons with disabilities are available. Call 1-800-547-8367. TDD users, call 711. L&I is an equal opportunity employer.

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