

CDC updated infection control guidance now recommends everyone entering a healthcare facility (e.g., employees, patients, visitors) to use cloth face coverings (e.g., reusable cloth masks, including homemade masks) regardless of symptoms. Cloth reusable masks offer some protection, but they do not replace PPEs when providing care to patients. Also, even if you wear cloth reusable masks, you should still practice social distancing and good hand hygiene.

Who Should Wear Reusable Cloth Masks? When to Wear?

- All employees, volunteers, and contractors who work at VAHCS. Instructions below for employees also apply to volunteers and contractors.
- All employees (including administrative or non-clinical staff) are required to wear reusable cloth masks in public places (e.g., hallway, breakroom, cafeteria, lobby, conference room, shared workplace).
 - No need to wear it if the workspace/office is not shared with anyone else, and the door can be closed.
 - This includes CBOCs, HBPC, and other community-based care settings.
- Cloth reusable masks are NOT PPE. For patient care, follow PPE guidance and use an appropriate medical facemask or N95 mask/PAPR if needed.

What to Wear?

- Employees are encouraged to bring their reusable cloth masks (e.g., homemade masks) to the workplace.
- Instructions to make homemade masks with or without sewing are available at:
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>
- If an employee cannot bring own reusable cloth masks, he or she can request up to two cloth face masks from the facility (the supply is limited, and bringing their masks is strongly encouraged).
 - If the reusable cloth masks are not available or an employee has a medical reason not to be able to wear a reusable cloth mask, the face shield alone can be used as an alternative.
 - If available, using both face shield and reusable cloth masks can provide additional benefits and prevent contamination of masks.

Proper Wear/Use:

- A reusable cloth mask is not a surgical mask and will not form a 100% seal. However, try to ensure that as little air as possible is coming in the sides of the mask. Adjust the straps or elastic so that the sides/top/bottom of the mask is as close to your skin as possible. If the elastic is too loose, try tying a small knot in it, or using a safety pin to the mask to make the elastic shorter. If the elastic is too tight, lace a fabric strap, or shoelace through the elastic loops and tie at the back of your head.
- If the mask has two different colored sides, make sure the same color is facing out each time you wear that mask. If it is the same color on both sides, mark one side with a sharpie or some other indicator so that the same side is always facing out.
- When you are wearing the mask, there is a small chance that coronavirus can land on the outside. Therefore, be careful when taking the mask off and launder it promptly. We recommend a breathable container (e.g., paper bag) to carry mask if you need to take it off when you leave the facility.
- Perform hand hygiene every time you touch your mask. Hand hygiene is also necessary before putting the mask on and before and after taking the mask off.

Caring for Your Mask:

- Please wash the mask thoroughly before each use. You can run it through the washing machine, or hand washes in hot, soapy water. Be sure to wash your hands every time after handling your mask.