



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
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March 3, 2021

TO: All DOC Staff
FROM: DOC COVID-19 Medical Team
SUBJECT: **Mask Up - Surgical Mask Expectations and Proper Use**

As Corrections continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, new information about the virus and how to keep yourself and others safe is continuously updated. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has indicated that not only is the type of mask important, the fit of the mask is also key to protecting yourself and those around you. Here are some workplace expectations for surgical mask wearing, along with some important reminders and tips on how to ensure you are properly wearing your surgical mask.

While at work it is required that:

- All Corrections staff, contract staff, and persons entering all department locations wear a surgical mask per Secretary Sinclair's previous [memo](#).
- Masks will be worn properly by covering both the nose and mouth with minimal gaps that allow free flowing air.

What you should know about your surgical mask:

- The surgical masks provided by Corrections have three (3) layers of fabric and provide excellent protection when worn correctly.
- To prevent air from leaking out the top of the mask it is important that you pinch the mask to bend the nose wire to fit closely around your nose.
- Check for gaps around the edges of the mask. If there is a gap on either side, the CDC has recommended the following ideas to help fit your surgical mask more snugly against your face:
 - Knotting the ear loops and tucking the material of your surgical mask can improve the fit. Watch this [video](#) from UNC Health or review '[Improve How Your Mask Protects You](#)' (DOC 600-PO001) for full step-by-step instructions.
 - Another option is to wear a well-fitted cloth mask over your surgical mask. While double masking is not required, it can improve the fit of the mask for all day wear.
- Do not double mask with two (2) surgical masks, this does not improve the fit.
- Do not double mask with a cloth mask in medical isolation, quarantine, intake separation, and transfer separation areas or areas within health services (outpatient clinic, inpatient unit, etc.) because it is important to immediately doff (take off) and dispose of your PPE after each use in these areas to avoid spreading the virus. *In these areas you can choose to knot and tuck your surgical face mask to improve the fit under your face shield.*

There has been a lot of information shared about COVID-19 over the past 12 months. Here are a few of the frequently asked questions:

Can I reuse my surgical mask?

- No, unauthorized reuse of PPE may lead to increased risk for self-contamination.
 - All PPE worn into quarantine, isolation, separation or other medical areas should be doffed (taken off) immediately when leaving the area and discarded and a new surgical mask should be put on.
 - Surgical masks worn in other areas while at work should be discarded each day.

Can I reuse my N95 respirator?

- The current supply of N95 respirators available for Corrections is sufficient to meet demand and N95 respirators should not routinely be reused and should be discarded immediately after use. Reuse is still permitted if you are only able to fit a specific brand that remains in short supply and follow the N95 reuse protocol as outlined in the [WA State DOC COVID-19 Screening, Testing, and Infection Control Guideline](#).
- In general do not wear a second mask over a fit-tested N95 respirator, as it can alter the shape and seal against your face and make it less effective. If you need to reuse your N95 per protocol, wearing a loose fitting surgical mask over the N95 is permitted.

When is it permissible to take off my mask at work?

- Masks must be worn at all times, however can be removed to eat or drink only if you are stationary and at least six (6) feet from any other individual.
- To properly doff your mask/s carefully.
 - Handle only by the ear loops or ties
 - Fold outside corners together
 - Immediately discard
 - Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing
 - *Remember, anytime you put on, take off, adjust, or touch your mask for any reason, you must immediately wash or sanitize your hands.*

Can I wear my personal N95 at work?

- No. This is not permitted under current Corrections' protocol unless you have a special accommodation approved by HR due to a medical condition.
- The N95 respirators used in Corrections are provided by the state Emergency Operations Center. There have been many counterfeit/fake N95 respirators on the market, therefore N95 respirators supplied by Corrections are the only ones permitted to be worn at work.

Can I wear my personal mask or respirator under my DOC issued surgical mask?

- No. This is not permitted under current Corrections' protocol unless you have a special accommodation approved by HR due to a medical condition.

What type of mask are the incarcerated and resident population required to wear?

- Effective March 4, 2021, all incarcerated individuals and work release residents are required to wear a surgical mask whenever they are outside their cell/room or leave their assigned bunk in an open dorm setting.
- As an option, incarcerated individuals and residents can:
 - Knot and tuck their surgical masks to allow for a better fit.

- Choose to wear a cloth face covering over their surgical mask to improve the fit.
- Surgical masks will be available for daily replacement or when mask is wet or soiled.
- Surgical masks must be worn when outdoors or during heavy exercise, but should be replaced soon after activity if the mask becomes wet.
- Individuals housed in Intensive Management Units will be provided with a surgical mask during movement only. The mask will be discarded upon returning to their cell and if necessary, can be checked to ensure the metal nose piece is still in place at that time.
- Individuals housed in Residential Treatment Units will use surgical masks without the metal nose piece or with the metal nose piece removed, and are required to wear a cloth mask over the surgical mask to improve fit.

Thank you for your continued dedication to keeping everyone safe. It is important that we continue to socially distance, mask up, maintain hand hygiene, get vaccinated when available, and stay home if sick, and we encourage you to follow these practices while you're away from work.