

STANDARD ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

34.99.99.M0.03 Usage of Face Coverings to Counter COVID-19 at Texas A&M University

Approved June 9, 2020

Next scheduled review: June 9, 2025

Official Procedure

1. FACE COVERING REQUIREMENTS

- 1.1. This SAP becomes effective Monday, June 15, 2020.
- 1.2. As we return to campus over the summer and in the fall, the health and safety of the Aggies (students, faculty, and staff), especially of vulnerable individuals, is of paramount importance. In light of CDC guidance, and to protect your fellow Aggies against COVID-19, face coverings (cloth face covering, surgical mask, etc.) **must be worn by all individuals (faculty, staff, students, and visitors) on campus in the following areas:** (1) indoor public areas on campus, except where marked otherwise, even if you are alone (includes all non-private office or residential spaces such as lobbies, restrooms, classrooms, teaching laboratories, research laboratories, common spaces in residence halls, conference rooms, and break rooms); and (2) outdoor spaces where 6 feet of physical distancing is difficult to reliably maintain. This policy will be amended as needed in response to conditions on campus.
- 1.3. Texas A&M recommends that all individuals on campus have at least three face coverings available to use throughout a week in order to begin each day with a new or cleaned face covering. Those face coverings should follow the current CDC recommendations. If using cloth face coverings they should, at a minimum, be made of multiple layers of tightly woven cotton fabric. Some common household materials may block particles more effectively than cotton (for example, see <https://cace.tamu.edu/research/covid-19-mask-materials/index.html>). Adding a layer of filter material within a cloth face covering is recommended. Additionally, FDA approved surgical masks may also be used as a face covering.

2. RATIONALE FOR USE OF FACE COVERINGS

- 2.1. The primary purpose of wearing a face covering is to reduce the amount of virus spreading from the wearer (who may not know they are spreading the virus) into the environment and to others. The secondary purpose of the face covering is to reduce the likelihood that large droplets containing virus that are generated by others may enter the nose and mouth of the wearer.

- 2.2. The use of a face covering does not replace the continued need to maintain physical distances from others, at least 6 feet, but instead augments physical distancing and helps us further reduce the likelihood of virus transmission.

3. FACE COVERING IN TEXAS A&M RESEARCH AREAS AND LABORATORIES

- 3.1. In light of CDC guidance, the Texas A&M Division of Research requires that everyone in a research laboratory or research building on campus wear a face covering (cloth face covering, surgical mask, etc.) as detailed in the Division of Research COVID-19 guidance (<https://vpr.tamu.edu/covid-19>).

Most face coverings are not respiratory protection and must not be substituted for the proper respiratory protection that you may be required as part of your research duties as identified in your respiratory protection program. Respirators with exhalation valves do not impede the spread of virus from the wearer, unless they contain an internal filter, so their use should be evaluated based upon the needs of the situation. Additionally, most cloth face coverings will not have the flame resistance found within FDA approved surgical masks or FDA/NIOSH approved filtering facepiece respirators. In research situations involving heat or open flame an FDA approved surgical mask or filtering facepiece respirator, as appropriate for the task, should be utilized.

4. EXCEPTIONS TO THE PROCEDURE

- 4.1. Exceptions/waivers for both areas and individuals will be evaluated on a case by case basis. Students who are asking for a modification to a policy (including wearing a face covering) due to a disability should work with their site-specific disability office (see FAQ for site-specific contact list). Student requests for exemptions based on a religious concern should contact the Office of the Dean of Student Life in College Station (<https://studentlife.tamu.edu>). Employee and visitor requests for exemptions based on a disability will follow the University SAP 08.01.02.M0.01, *Reasonable Accommodation Requests Under the Americans with Disabilities Act* at <https://rules-saps.tamu.edu/PDFs/08.01.02.M0.01.pdf>. Employee and visitor requests for exemptions based on a religious concern should contact Employee Relations in the Division of Human Resources and Organizational Effectiveness (<https://employees.tamu.edu/employee-relations>). For areas or occupations where wearing a face covering is not feasible and is not based on a disability or religious concern, a request for an exception to this policy may be made to the Face Coverings Committee by sending an email message to facecovering@tamu.edu that includes: the request, the reason that face coverings are not feasible, and the additional safety measures taken to further mitigate the risk in the absence of face coverings. Areas where face covering requirements are waived must be clearly marked with signs indicating that an exception to wearing face coverings has been granted. In some cases, face shields may be approved for use instead of face coverings.

5. FACE COVERING 101

- 5.1. TIPS for wearing a face covering during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Face coverings must be used in conjunction with physical distancing (6 feet social distancing), engineering controls (barriers between people) and/or administrative controls (reduced number of people at events).
- Face coverings may reduce the spread of viruses and droplets from the wearer to others.
- Face coverings may reduce the likelihood that droplets from others enter the wearer's nose or mouth.
- Face coverings may reduce the spread of aerosols from asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic COVID-19 carriers.
- Face coverings become contaminated as you wear them, both from yourself and from the environment around you. You should treat them as contaminated and avoid self-contamination or contamination of others by unsafe handling.
- Remember to wash your hands frequently and to avoid touching your face as much as possible.
- Some individuals may not be able to wear a face covering due to a medical contraindication.

5.2 Face coverings must be put on properly:

- <https://app1.unmc.edu/nursing/heroes/mpv.cfm?updateindex=133&src=yt>
- Face coverings should fully cover your nose and mouth.
- Face coverings should be held in place firmly with straps.
- When you are putting on a face covering, do so by the straps and adjust the covering to cover your nose and mouth, being careful not to touch your face in the process.
- Once your covering is in place, wash your hands, and wash your hands after each time you adjust your covering.

5.3 Face coverings must be taken off properly to avoid self-contamination:

- Remove face coverings by the straps and move it gently away from your face. Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing.
- If your face covering is disposable, then promptly throw it away; do not place it into your pocket, backpack or where it may contaminate your belongings.
- If you have a disposable face covering that you have to reuse, then make sure that you store it between uses in a clean breathable container (paper bag) and be careful not to touch the inside of the face covering. Do not store in an airtight container.
- If you have a reusable cloth face covering, make sure you wash it after each use (a washing machine is fine). Learn more about how to wash your face covering (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wash-cloth-face-coverings.html>).
- Wash your hands after handling a used face covering.

5.4 TAMU Face Covering Frequently Asked Questions can be found at <https://provost.tamu.edu/Menu/News/TAMU-Face-Covering-FAQs>.

Related Statutes, Policies or Requirements

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/cloth-face-coverings-information.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/cloth-face-covering.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/DIY-cloth-face-covering-instructions.pdf>

Liu, et. al, Aerodynamic analysis of SARS-CoV-2 in two Wuhan hospitals. *Nature*, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2271-3>.

Contact Office

OFFICE OF RESPONSIBILITY: Office of the Provost