

**City of Virginia Beach**

**Updated Guidance for Cloth Face Mask/Face Coverings Used by City Employees During the COVID-19 Pandemic (including the directed use of Face Shields)**

This document provides general information for City of Virginia Beach employees to safely use cloth masks/face coverings when they will be in contact with or close proximity to others. It is important to note that cloth masks/face coverings are not a substitute for always practicing physical distancing and frequent handwashing. All of these actions together contribute to your safety.

Our best individual and organizational defense against COVID-19 is to properly wash our hands frequently, avoid touching our eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands, avoid being around sick people and practicing physical distancing, especially by staying at home when necessary. Cloth masks/face coverings are not a replacement for these evidence-based strategies for slowing the spread of disease; they are an additional tool that can protect others from possible exposure to respiratory droplets that may come from our mouth when we talk, sneeze or cough.

Cloth masks/face coverings are not intended for use by healthcare workers, first responders, corrections staff, and others during the course of their work requiring close-contact with people who are ill or suspect to be ill. They are also not intended for someone who has trouble breathing, is incapacitated, or is otherwise unable to remove a mask/cover without assistance.

# What is a cloth face mask or covering?

A cloth mask/face covering is made of multiple layers of material (at least two) that completely covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with ties or straps, and made of a variety of materials, such as cotton, linen or blends. A cloth face mask/covering may be factory-made or by hand or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts, etc. These are best made with multiple layers of fabric and allow for breathing without restriction. Do not crochet masks, use materials that are mesh, or clearly have holes rendering them ineffective.

# Why wear a face mask/cover?

Consistent scientific and medical information indicates that covering your nose and mouth can help slow the spread of COVID-19 because:

* Individuals can be contagious before the onset of symptoms and do not know it. If you have covered your nose and mouth, it can limit the spread of COVID-19.
* We touch our face less when our face is covered. Touching your face after touching something contaminated with COVID-19 increases your chances of getting sick.

# How well do cloth face masks/coverings work to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

There is clear and positive evidence that shows the use of cloth masks/face coverings during a pandemic does help reduce disease transmission. Their primary role is reducing the release of infectious particles into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes, including someone who has COVID-19 but feels well. Cloth masks/face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing, washing hands and staying home when ill, but they are helpful when combined with these primary interventions. When you use a mask or face covering it is important to keep both your nose and mouth covered. Lowering the covering from your nose and mouth while talking defeats the purpose of wearing the face covering since you can spread the virus while talking.

# Why should I cover my face now when a face covering was not recommended initially?

Since the pandemic began, we have learned that individuals may be contagious and spread COVID-19 even if they do not have symptoms. This is called being asymptomatic. This has shown us that face masks/coverings protect others from infection by preventing the spread of infectious droplets.

# Ref:[*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/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html)

# When should I wear a cloth face covering?

In accordance with Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, [Executive Order 72 (2021);](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/executive-actions/)

All City employees shall wear a face covering while working at their place of employment.

You are required to wear a cloth face mask or covering over your nose and mouth including while in our vehicles when there is more than one person in the vehicle. Wearing a cloth face mask or covering does not eliminate the need to physically distance yourself from others and continue to wash your hands frequently. Unless you are in an office alone, you must wear a face mask or covering.

# Is a face mask or cover required?

We require employees wear a face mask/covering per Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, [Executive Order 72 (2021)](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/executive-actions/). Face masks and coverings are an additional tool that individuals must use to help slow the spread of COVID-19 but they do not replace other infection control measures. This recent change now requires the use of a face mask or covering in the workplace even if 6’ or greater from others. Exceptions are noted in the current Governors Executive Order.

# How should I care for a cloth mask/face covering?

It’s a good idea to wash your cloth mask/face covering frequently, ideally daily. Have a bag or container to store cloth mask/face coverings until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried. Bleach is not indicated as it may damage or break down the fibers of the cloth used in the mask/covering. If you must re-wear your mask/covering before washing it, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. Discard cloth masks/face coverings that:

* No longer fully cover both the nose and mouth
* Have stretched out or have damaged ties or straps
* Cannot stay on the face appropriately
* Have holes or tears in the fabric rendering it ineffective

# What are my cloth face mask/covering options?

Acceptable, reusable face mask or covering options include:

* Manufactured masks or devices intended for general population use (non-healthcare or first responder)
* Multiple layered neck gaiter or homemade face covering
* Tightly woven fabric, such as cotton t-shirts (of at least two-ply material)
* Bandana, Scarf (of at least two-ply material)

# Can I use a N95 respirator or clinical mask instead?

Purchasing a respirator or a clinical (type) mask intended for the healthcare settings and caregiver, health workers or first responders is strongly discouraged. These resources are worn for protection by healthcare staff, first responders and those workers who provide care to a person who might have COVID-19 or other communicable diseases. N95 respirators also require a medical clearance, training, and fit-testing to be worn effectively.

In contrast, the simple face mask/covering recommended for our workforce is intended to prevent COVID-19 transmission to others by someone who might not know they are infected. This is called source control. Since the intent of the cloth face mask or cover is to primarily protect others rather than the person wearing the mask, a surgical face mask is generally not necessary. Medical respirators and procedure/surgical masks are needed to safely provide care for persons sick with COVID-19.

# Can I use Face Shield instead of a cloth face mask or covering?

A plastic face shield is a form of PPE meant to be used for protecting eyes and the face. It is not a suitable substitute for a face mask or covering. However, if an employee has a valid medical contraindication that prohibits them from wearing a cloth face mask or covering, then they must wear a face shield that wraps around their face and extends below their chin. They should maintain 6’ physical distancing from others, and also maintain their provided face shield per the manufacturer’s instructions.