

Update for essential employees and supervisors – cloth face coverings

On Friday, the CDC began advising Americans to wear cloth face coverings when in public spaces such as grocery stores and pharmacies where it is difficult to maintain 6-foot social distancing.

At this time, we do not recommend or require that employees performing work on campus wear cloth face coverings although employees are permitted to do so if they wish. Social distancing and good hygiene remain the most effective measures to use in the workplace.

Cloth face coverings are different from traditional respiratory protection devices like N-95 respirators and surgical masks. **Personal protective equipment (PPE) such as surgical masks and N-95 respirators have been, and will continue to be, provided to employees who have potential exposure to Covid-19 or other hazardous substances related to their work and must be reserved for this purpose.** This type of personal protective equipment will not be used in lieu of cloth face coverings.

The CDC recommendation is based on the fact that there may be some marginal benefit in reducing droplet spread among those who may be infected, but do not yet have symptoms, by wearing a cloth face coverings in public when social distancing is not possible or practical.

The cloth face covering is not meant to replace more effective means of preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus like those we have already implemented including:

- Maintaining social distancing practices at work and in the community (maintaining a distance of 6 feet or more from others);
- Practicing good respiratory hygiene and frequent handwashing;
- Monitoring for symptoms of Covid-19 such as fever, cough and shortness of breath; and
- Staying home and isolating if symptoms are present.

If you feel that you need to work in close proximity to others, please contact your supervisor to identify measures that can be taken to maintain appropriate social distancing. If you feel that your concerns cannot be resolved, please contact UW Occupational Health at occmed@uhs.wisc.edu or call 608-265-5610.

Finally, please note that use of a cloth face covering does not allow employees to come to work if they are having symptoms or have a documented exposure risk. In fact, doing so would increase the chances of spreading illness in the workplace.