Face Coverings / Masks
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
January 6, 2022

1. Q: What is the new face covering/mask requirement that everyone is talking about?
   A: Cal OSHA passed a revision to the COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard effective January 14, 2022, and has refined the definition of a face covering for employees to wear a higher quality face covering that does not let light pass through when held up to a light source. Examples of such face coverings include:
   - a surgical mask,
   - a medical procedure mask,
   - a respirator worn voluntarily (also commonly known as an N95), or
   - A tightly woven fabric or non-woven material of at least two layers (i.e., fabrics that do not let light pass through when held up to a light source) that completely covers the nose and mouth and is secured to the head with ties, ear loops, or elastic bands that go behind the head.

   Face coverings should be a snug-fitting mask. Both surgical masks and N95s are available from UCI at no cost to employees.

2. Q: How do I request face coverings (i.e. surgical masks, N95 respirators, etc.) for myself or my department?
   A: Approved face coverings for individuals are available at various locations around campus, including the back-up distribution campus locations. For bulk orders, please email your request to safety@uci.edu or complete the COVID Supplies Request form. Orders can be picked up at EHS located at 4600 Health Sciences Road, building 41 on the campus map, Monday through Friday, 8 am – 4 pm.

3. Q: Is there a standard or guideline for surgical masks?
   A: Yes, surgical masks are rated by American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) levels.

4. Q: How often do I need to replace my surgical mask or N95? Can I re-wear them more than once?
   A: We recommend following the manufacturer’s instructions on usage.

5. Q: How many surgical masks should I request per person for my department?
   A: This will depend on the number of people physically present in the office and their weekly usage.

6. Q: What is the most protective mask for the Omicron variant?
   A: There are no specific face coverings/masks that are designated to be protective for any specific COVID-19 variant, including for Omicron. The general consensus is that masks that fit snuggly against the face, covering your nose and mouth, are protective for both you and people around you.
7. **Q: How can I obtain an N95 respirator?**
   A: Employees who choose to wear an N95 should follow the directions on the [Face Coverings and Voluntary Use Respirators](#) page. Prior to wearing an N95, employees must complete a brief training in [UC Learning Center](#) (search for “N95 Voluntary Use”). Individuals who want an N95 respirator can pick them up at EHS and at multiple locations listed on the [EHS webpage](#). For bulk orders, please send an email to [safety@uci.edu](mailto:safety@uci.edu) or complete the [COVID-19 Supplies Request form](#). Orders can be picked up at EHS located at 4600 Health Sciences Road, building 41 on the campus map, Monday through Friday, 8 am – 4 pm.

   For questions regarding N95s or respiratory protection, contact EHS at (949) 824-6200 or at [safety@uci.edu](mailto:safety@uci.edu).

8. **Q: Why is training required to wear a voluntary-use N95?**
   A: Employees choosing to wear N95s voluntarily are required to take training as part of [Cal OSHA’s Respiratory Protection Standard](#). Wearing an N95 for COVID-19 protection purposes for most employees (not working in a hospital setting) is considered voluntary use.

9. **Q: What’s the difference between an N95 and a KN95 respirator? Are both types approved for use on campus?**
   A: Yes, both N95 and KN95 respirators are approved to be worn on campus and meet Cal OSHA’s face covering definition. N95s are certified by NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health), the research branch of OSHA. N95s have two straps that are secured behind both the head and neck. KN95s are not certified by NIOSH, but provide a similar level of protection as N95s. KN95s are usually secured to the head with ear loops or ties.

10. **Q: How will face-covering requirements be enforced?**
    A: Face-coverings requirements will be enforced like other posted safety requirements.

11. **Q: Are supervisors responsible for their own employees’ COVID safety compliance?**
    A: Yes, supervisors are responsible for ensuring their employees are in compliance with all applicable safety requirements, including wearing acceptable face coverings/masks.

12. **Q: Are students also required to wear surgical masks?**
    A: No, surgical masks are not required to be worn by students. However, face coverings (which may include, but are not limited to surgical masks) are required to be worn on campus as described in the [Face Coverings Executive Directive](#).

13. **Q: Are instructors allowed to wear face coverings with clear panels?**
    A: Yes. The revised Cal OSHA standard face-covering definition includes face coverings or cloth face coverings with a clear plastic panel that, despite the non-cloth material allowing light to pass through, otherwise meet this definition and which may be used to facilitate communication with people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing or others who need to see a speaker’s mouth or facial expressions to understand speech or sign language respectively.

14. **Q: Are employees allowed to wear their own masks, even if they are cloth masks?**
    A: Yes, as long as they meet the requirements as described in question #1 above.
15. Q: Can I wear a face shield instead of a face covering?
   A: You may wear a face shield but are required to wear an approved face-covering under the face shield.

16. Q: I forgot/lost/broke my face covering while on campus. What are my options?
   A: Additional face coverings are available at select locations around campus:
   
   - Pippen Dining Commons – entrance
   - Brandywine Dining Commons – entrance
   - Parking Structure Kiosk across from Student Center - contact parking attendant
   - Anteater Learning Pavilion – entrance of building
   - Engineering Tower loading dock - contact Dennis Aldridge
   - School of Law – contact Garth Revtyak
   - Med Sci C Stack – contact Jeff Dillon
   - McGaugh Hall loading dock room 1439F - contact Robyn Stiffler
   - Anteater Recreation Center (ARC) - front desk
   - FRESH Hub every Wednesday 11 - 4pm and Thursdays 1 - 4pm
   - EHS building – lobby front desk