

Face Coverings / Masks Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

January 17, 2022

1. Q: Are face coverings required on Campus?

A: You are required to wear a face covering while indoors in all public spaces on UCI-controlled property in order to reduce possible exposure to COVID-19 and help prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the UCI community. If you are outdoors and not fully vaccinated, it is recommended that you wear a face covering if six feet of physical distance between people cannot be maintained. UCI's [Executive Directive on Face Coverings](#) also applies to off-site work conducted by UCI employees and is subject to change. Current directives and advisories are available at: [Executive Directives and Policies | Coronavirus Information Hub | UCI](#)

2. Q: Do face coverings help reduce the spread of COVID-19?

A: Wearing face coverings can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 by people who may not know that they are infected with the virus. Face coverings combined with other preventative practices, such as frequent handwashing and physical distancing, help slow the spread of infection.

3. Q: How do I wear a face covering?

A: Perform hand hygiene before handling face covering, make sure it fits snugly over the nose, mouth, and chin with no large gaps on the outside of the face, secure the face covering with ties, ear loops, or tie it behind the head. Make sure hands are clean if any adjustments are needed.

4. 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.

5. Q: How do I obtain disposable face covering for myself?

A: Approved face coverings for individuals are available at [select campus locations](#).

6. Q: How do I obtain a bulk order of face coverings for my building/department?

A: For departments that would like to place bulk orders greater than 1,000, please complete the [Return to Site - Supplies Needed form](#) or email safety@uci.edu.

7. Q: Is there a standard or guideline for surgical masks?

A: [Surgical masks](#) are rated by American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) levels.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. Q: What is the most protective mask ?

A: Most public health professionals agree that any face covering is better than no face covering, but different face coverings come with different levels of protection. N95s, which filter airborne particles at a high rate, provide some of the highest levels of protection. KN95s and surgical masks also generally provide better levels of protection than single layer cloth masks. Whichever face covering you wear, it is important that it fits snugly and completely covers the mouth and nose. The better quality the face covering, and the better it fits against your face, the more protection it will likely provide you.

11. Q: How can I obtain a voluntary-use N95 respirator for myself?

A: Employees who choose to wear an N95 should pick up at [select campus locations](#) or email safety@uci.edu. Prior to wearing an N95, employees must complete a brief training in [UC Learning Center](#) (search for "N95 Voluntary Use").

12. Q: How do I obtain a bulk order of N95s for my building/department?

A: For bulk orders greater than 20, please send an email to safety@uci.edu.

13. Q: What's the difference between a Voluntary Use Respirator (N95) and a KN95 mask as it relates to approved face coverings? Are both types approved for use on campus to mitigate the risks of COVID exposure?

A: Yes, Voluntary Use Respirators (N95) and KN95s are approved for use on campus to mitigate the risks of COVID exposure. N95s respirators are considered respirators, having a very close facial fit and approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). They are allowed for COVID mitigation and other approved respiratory protection program exposures. KN95s are not certified by NIOSH, but are considered acceptable as a campus-approved face covering for COVID use.

In addition, under the current Cal OSHA standards, an employee who is issued and uses N95s on a voluntary basis to mitigate COVID exposure must complete a brief training program that provides instruction on how to properly don and doff an N95, how to ensure proper fit, and how to properly care for the respirator. If employees are issued an N95 to mitigate exposures other

than COVID, the full requirements of the Campus Respiratory Protection Program apply (i.e. employees must complete a medical questionnaire, be properly fit-tested, and complete mandatory respirator use training).

For additional clarification or questions regarding N95s, please contact EHS for assistance at safety@uci.edu or at (949) 824-6200.

14. 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.

15. Q: How will face-covering requirements be enforced?

A: Face-coverings requirements will be enforced like other posted safety requirements.

16. 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.

17. 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](#).

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. Q: I don't have / forgot / lost / broke my face covering while on campus. What are my options?

A: Additional face coverings are available at [select campus locations](#).

22. Q: How do I remove a face covering?

A: To remove all types of face coverings, perform hand hygiene before removing the face covering, carefully remove the face covering by loosening the ties or ear loops. do not touch eyes, nose and mouth when removing face covering. If using a cloth or non-woven face

covering, place it in a clean bag or container to be stored until it can be reused or cleaned. Immediately wash hands after removing face covering.

23. Q: How do I care for a cloth face covering?

A: When soiled or dirty, wash the face covering using a washing machine. The frequency of washing is dependent on frequency of use. It is recommended that the face covering be washed at least daily per CDC guidelines. Wash items as appropriate to the material or in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting and dry completely before storage and reuse. Store clean face covering in a clean bag or container until it can be reused. Containers used to store used or dirty face coverings should be cleaned prior to reuse.

24. Q: Is there a recommendation for Flame Resistant (FR) face coverings for use with flammable and pyrophoric materials?

A: EH&S does not recommend wearing face coverings that have been treated with a flame retardant. The flame retardant can flake off, be inhaled, and cause skin irritation. Instead, you may opt to wear face coverings made of NOMEX material. It is not a treated fabric but a fire resistant meta-aramid fiber woven into yarn and then into a fabric. NOMEX face coverings can be washed repeatedly without losing its flame-resistant properties. However, the number of repeated washing is limited and the face covering must be replaced when it begins to show signs of wear and tear.