COVID-19: Cloth Face Covering Frequently Asked Questions

Background:
Safety is a priority for our System, and we are doing all we can to continue to protect colleagues from exposure to COVID-19. During this current pandemic we are pursuing contingencies to preserve the supply of medical grade, disposable masks and respirators for colleagues and clinicians when caring for patients. One of these contingencies is to make nontraditional cloth face coverings available for colleagues who want to wear a mask while at work when not patient-facing or in other situations when traditional personal protective equipment (PPE) is not needed. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended Universal Source Control in all health care facilities. Our current supply of medical grade, disposable masks will quickly deplete if worn by all when in our ministries, outside of instances when traditional PPE is required. Therefore, we've identified commercial manufacturers of cloth face coverings and have received offers from members in the communities we serve to provide these face coverings for use inside our facilities for those not involved in direct patient care.

Nontraditional cloth face coverings, made of two to three layers of tightly woven cotton fabric, do not offer the same protection as medical grade, disposable procedure or surgical masks and are not to be used when patient facing or for care processes and procedures in which traditional PPE is required. The FAQs below are a companion to the guide on nontraditional PPE.

FAQs Regarding Cloth Face Coverings

Q: If I am caring for COVID-19 patients, PUIs, and patients who are not suspect or confirmed, how would I manage the transition between a cloth face covering and the traditional disposable medical grade mask?

A: A mask or face covering is required for all colleagues who enter our facilities. Colleagues in non-patient facing roles must wear a cloth face covering. All patient facing colleagues are to follow the PPE guidance in the PPE Guidebook. Follow all guidelines regarding donning and doffing when transitioning between cloth face coverings to PPE and between PPE types.

Q: If I am already wearing a cloth face covering, can I put a surgical mask over it? Will it provide me with more protection?

A: No. Cloth face coverings do not provide the same protection as traditional, disposable medical grade masks. There is no additional benefit from wearing a cloth face covering under a disposable one – just use the traditional, disposable mask and eye protection for the situation in which it is needed, e.g. entering room of a PUI or COVID-19 patient. Cloth face coverings are not considered PPE, since their capability to protect healthcare professionals is less than that of a traditional
mask. Placing a surgical mask over a cloth face covering will not increase your protection and could cause you to have difficulty breathing and communicating with the patient.

Q: If I’m entering a confirmed COVID-19 patient room, and I have a cloth face covering on, can I put a face shield on over the cloth covering and forego the surgical mask? Won’t the face shield keep my face protected?

A: No. The respiratory protection from a cloth face covering is far less than a surgical mask. A face shield and cloth face covering will not protect you from inhaling fine droplets if you are within six feet of the patient, particularly should the patient cough or sneeze.

Q: I work in a non-patient care area. Do I need a cloth face covering?

A: Updated CDC guidelines require all colleagues to wear a face covering. Colleagues in non-patient care areas are to wear cloth face coverings.

Q: I feel safer wearing a mask because I don’t know if I will be in contact with someone who has been exposed. Is this a best practice?

A: In light of new data about how COVID-19 spreads, along with evidence of widespread COVID-19 illness in communities across the country, CDC recommends that people wear a cloth face covering to cover their nose and mouth in the community setting. This is an additional public health measure people should take to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in addition to (not instead of) social distancing, frequent hand cleaning and other everyday preventive actions. A cloth face covering is not intended to protect the wearer but may prevent the spread of virus from the wearer to others. This would be especially important in the event that someone is infected but does not have symptoms. A cloth face covering should be worn whenever people must go into public settings (grocery stores, for example). Please see Table 1, below, regarding the efficacy of double layer, sewn cloth face coverings (“stitched masks”), similar to those produced by Trinity Health’s manufacturing partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mask type</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Threads/in.</th>
<th>Average jet distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncovered</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>~8 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandana</td>
<td>Elastic T-shirt material</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>~3 ft 7 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folded handkerchief</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1 ft 3 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stitched mask</td>
<td>Quilting cotton</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.5 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial mask</td>
<td>Unknown, Randomly assorted fibres</td>
<td>8 in.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*CVS Cone Face Mask.

Colleagues are to wear masks or face coverings correctly; cloth face coverings must cover the mouth and nose. Medical masks and N95 respirators are reserved for healthcare workers and other first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance. The most important ways to protect
yourself against COVID-19 are to clean your hands, disinfectant your work area, maintain social distancing protocols and remind those not wearing masks to do so.

Q: How can I obtain a cloth face covering if I can’t make one at home?
A: Cloth face coverings have been ordered for our ministries and are in production from textile manufacturers. The point at which these will be available varies, so check with your supervisor for any updates on their availability at your workplace. Many ministries have received offers by people in the community to make cloth face coverings. These are acceptable to use as well but each ministry that receives these donations will arrange to launder them before making them available. Discuss the potential availability of a cloth face covering with your immediate supervisor.

Cloth face coverings are not considered PPE; as such, colleagues may purchase their own coverings, if they:
- Adhere to professional standards
- Do not contain an exhalation valve. Exhalation valves on cloth masks do not contain respiratory secretions and must not be worn by colleagues.
- Do contain at least two layers of tightly woven cotton fabric, preferably three.

Q: How do I correctly wear a cloth face covering?
A: The face covering must cover both your mouth and nose. Wearing a face covering that does not cover your mouth and nose can expose you or those around you to COVID-19.

Q: Can I wear the same cloth face covering all shift?
A: When worn all day, face coverings will likely become damp and soiled. Should you notice your face covering or mask is soiled, becoming damp, or it is difficult to breathe through, you should replace it with a clean one.

Q: Should I wash my cloth face covering at the end of each shift?
A: When worn all day, cloth face coverings will retain expired respiratory moisture and become soiled. We recommend that you carefully remove your cloth face covering and launder per CDC instructions. Because these are not worn during patient care, they can safely be transported home and washed when soiled or damp.

Q: I don’t work in acute care, I work in a community-based setting. Won’t a cloth face covering do?

Colleagues in non-acute care settings like Home Care and Senior Communities can wear cloth face coverings between patients but need to remove the cloth face covering and put appropriate PPE per the PPE Guidebook.
Q: I accidently failed to mask with a regular procedural mask entering a PUI room. Should I report this?

A: You should notify your immediate supervisor right away and complete an incident in the THEIR application. Your supervisor will provide you with instructions.

Reference:

Visualizing the effectiveness of face masks in obstructing respiratory jets:
https://aip.scitation.org/doi/10.1063/5.0016018