COVID-19: Reusable Cloth Masks as an Important Strategy to Conserve Medical Grade Masks

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Background

Safety is a priority for our organization, and we are doing all we can to continue to protect colleagues from exposure to COVID-19. We continue to identify contingencies to preserve the supply of medical grade, disposable masks and respirators for colleagues and clinicians when caring for patients under investigation (PUI) and those with confirmed COVID-19. 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. 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 would be quickly depleted if worn by all inside our hospitals when not involved in patient care. 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.

Cloth face coverings are not considered Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Cloth face coverings, made of 2-3 layers of tightly woven cotton fabric, are not as protective as medical grade, disposable procedure or surgical masks and are not to be used for direct patient care except as described below.

Use of Cloth Face Coverings by Colleagues and Clinicians:

- **Do not use a cloth face covering when caring for any PUI or patient with confirmed COVID-19.** Instead follow System Office requirements for appropriate PPE to wear when caring for PUIs or confirmed COVID-19 patients, as outlined in the PPE Guidebook.
- **To be effective, cloth face coverings must:**
  - Be worn covering the nose and mouth
  - Be made 2-3 layers of tightly woven cotton fabric (as recommended by the CDC).
  - No bandanas or gaiter-style coverings (see Appendix for photos)
  - Never contain an exhalation valve. Exhalation valves do not contain respiratory secretions.
- **Cloth face coverings used by colleagues outside of direct patient care can be kept by the colleague or clinician and laundered at home.**
  - For home laundering, wash according to the CDC instructions.

Traditional PPE

- **Traditional PPE includes any manufactured, medical grade disposable mask, N95 respirator, PAPR, CAPR, eye protection, face shield, gloves, or gown.**
- **All healthcare personnel providing care for the following populations must continue to follow system-wide guidance based on CDC recommendations and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements for use of appropriate PPE.** Examples of this appropriate use include:
  - Care of PUIs or COVID-19+ patients
  - Any patient requiring transmission-based isolation precautions.
System-wide guidance for PPE use during the COVID-19 pandemic can be found on the MercyOne COVID-19 Resources Page under Personal Protective Equipment.

Appendix – Unacceptable Cloth Face Coverings

Acceptable Cloth Face Coverings

References:


See also CDC recommendations for preserving use of medical grade, disposable masks: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/face-masks.html