



United States Department of Agriculture
Office of the Deputy Secretary Washington, D.C. 20250

Notice to USDA Employees About Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19

April 4, 2020

On Friday, April 3rd, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released an [updated recommendation](#) on the use of cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

The cloth face coverings recommended by CDC are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.

CDC is now recommending the voluntary use of cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Per the CDC, the purpose of wearing a face covering is to help prevent the transmission of coronavirus from individuals who may be infected but are not showing symptoms. As such, USDA's mission-essential workforce, whose duties require they continue to work at their primary job site every day and who do not typically wear masks as part of their jobs, may consider wearing a cloth face covering consistent with this updated CDC recommendation.

Face coverings should be maintained in a sanitary manner and should not be distracting or offensive to others. Additional information on how to make and wear cloth face coverings is attached and available on the CDC [website](#). CDC recommends that face coverings should:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face;
- be secured with ties or ear loops;
- include multiple layers of fabric;
- allow for breathing without restriction;
- and be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

As you are aware, the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including face masks, is currently limited due to significant increases in demand, especially in the healthcare sector. Given the shortage of supplies for the healthcare industry, USDA is actively assessing the Department's inventory of PPE. While the Department is unable to provide masks to all mission essential employees at this time, we will notify our workforce as soon as possible as additional information, guidance, or supplies become available.

Social Distancing and Hand Hygiene

It is important to emphasize that face coverings are not a replacement for proper social distancing and hand hygiene. Employees should continue to:

- Minimize your contact with others as much as possible through proper social distancing.
 - Increase distance between yourself and other mission essential employees within your workspace as much as possible.
 - Limit conversations with other mission essential employees and stand as far apart as possible.
 - Do not hold large, in-person meetings.
- Clean your hands often.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
 - If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily.
 - This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desk phones, and keyboards.
- Stay home if you are sick.

Please contact your supervisor should you have questions.