COVID-19 Safe Work Procedures – Face Masks

Purpose

Safe Work Procedures for COVID-19 and droplet borne viruses will help prevent communicable disease transmission in the workplace. These procedures apply to all staff using face masks in the course of their work activities.

Note: This procedure does not cover the use of surgical masks or respirators (e.g., N95s, KN95s, half-face elastomeric air-purifying respirators, etc.). For assistance with the use of that equipment or similar, please contact Workplace Health and Safety via AskMyHR.

Definitions

Non-surgical procedural masks/single-use mask:

Non-medical masks which provide a high level of filtration but do not have an ASTM rating.

Non-medical (cloth) mask:

Any mask or face covering that is made of at least two layers of tightly woven material such as cotton or linen, is large enough to cover a person's nose and mouth completely and comfortably without gaping and can be secured to a person's head with ties or ear loops.

COVID-19 Transmission

According to the BC Centre for Disease Control, "COVID-19 is spread by the respiratory droplets an infected person produces when they breathe, cough, sneeze, talk, or sing. If you are in contact with an infected person, the virus can enter your body if droplets get into your throat, nose, or eyes.

Droplets come in a wide range of sizes and they behave differently depending on their size. Larger droplets are heavier, and they usually fall to the ground within two metres. Smaller droplets, also known as aerosols, are lighter and they can float in the air for longer.

Smaller droplets can collect in enclosed spaces when there is not enough fresh air. Indoor accumulation is greater when more people share a space, spend more time together, or exercise, sing, shout, or speak loudly. These conditions can lead to COVID-19 transmission."

Standard Precautions for COVID-19 in the Workplace

Each workplace requires a Communicable Disease Prevention Plan (CDPP) where policies and practices to prevent communicable disease transmission are outlined in detail. Check your CDPP for any face mask requirements specific to your ministry, or region for any public health Orders.

Will a Face Mask Protect Me from COVID-19?

Wearing a mask over the mouth and nose can help reduce the inadvertent spread of COVID-19 through respiratory droplets spread by asymptomatic people. **Non-medical and cloth masks do not fully protect the person wearing it**, and they may not be effective in blocking all virus particles. They do not provide complete protection from communicable disease transmission because of a potential loose fit and the materials used. Masks do protect others by containing your droplets and aerosols from spreading.

Limitations

Cloth and procedural masks are not medical devices, are not regulated like medical masks and respirators and their use poses several limitations:

- They have not been tested to recognized standards
- The materials are not the same as used in surgical masks or respirators
- The edges are not designed to form a seal around the nose and mouth
- They may not provide complete protection against virus-sized particles
- They may be difficult to breathe through

Appropriate use of a face mask:

Face masks should:
- Allow for easy breathing
- Fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops
- Be changed as soon as possible if damp or dirty
- Be comfortable and not require frequent adjustment
- Be large enough to completely and comfortably cover the nose and mouth without gaping

Face masks should not:
- Impair vision or interfere with tasks
- Be secured with tape or other inappropriate materials
- Be placed on anyone unable to remove them without assistance or anyone who has trouble breathing

Safe Work Practices

The following safe work practices are a set of methods or "Dos and Don'ts" on how to use non-surgical procedural masks:

DO's:
- Make sure it fits well and doesn't gape at the sides
- Wash your hands before putting it on and after taking it off
- Avoid touching your face mask while using it
- Wear masks for a short time
- Change a mask by only touching the straps or ear-loops, as soon as it gets damp or soiled by putting it directly into a paper bag (for re use) or a garbage bin (for disposal)
- Dispose of masks properly in a no-touch lined garbage bin or place in a brown paper bag for drying and re use (if mask is in satisfactory condition for re use – e.g., not soiled, torn, crumpled, etc.)

DONT's:
- Don't share masks with others
- Don't wear a mask that is damp or soiled
- Don't reuse a mask that is damp, soiled, torn or crumpled
- Don't place a used procedure mask on any work surface, common area or equipment. There is a potential risk of infection due to droplet transfer

Donning & Doffing

How to put on a non-medical procedural mask – ear loop style:

	• Wash/sanitize your hands before donning.
	• Pull at the top and bottom to open the pleats or chamber. • With colored or printed side facing out, and the nose wire at the top, put your fingers through the ear loops position the mask
	• Pull the mask from the top and bottom to fully open the folds of the mask and adjust the mask around the face.
	• Gently re-form (do not pinch) the nose wire (if equipped) over the bridge of the nose and make any final adjustment.

How to remove a non-medical procedural mask – ear-loop style
1. Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds. If none is available, use hand sanitizer with a minimum 60 per cent alcohol base.
2. Ensure that you are within easy reach of a brown paper bag/lined garbage bin.
3. Reach BEHIND your ears and grasp both ear loops.
4. Remove the mask outward from your face by handling only the ear loops.
5. Place the mask into the paper bag or lined garbage bin.
6. Wash/sanitize your hands.

Are You Performing Other Work Activities?

If you're performing other work activities not covered here, please review the full list of COVID-19 Safe Work Procedures on MyHR.

For assistance with additional procedures, please contact Workplace Health and Safety via AskMyHR.