

COVID-19 Universal Mask Recommendation for Long-term Care and Assisted Living Facilities May 13, 2020

Nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities, and assisted living facilities (collectively known as long-term care facilities, LTCFs) provide a variety of services, both medical and personal care, to people who are unable to manage independently in the community. As an additional infection prevention and control measure in these settings, the New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services (DPHS) has recommended universal use of facemasks by essential visitors and personnel throughout the facility. This document is specific to long term care facilities and may be applicable to some rehabilitation centers and similar settings that provide care for elderly or patients with underlying medical vulnerabilities to severe outcome or death with COVID-19.

Cloth face coverings are intended to prevent transmission from the person wearing the face covering (i.e. source control) due to the possibility of asymptomatic/pre-symptomatic transmission. Medical-grade surgical masks are intended to be personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect the person wearing the mask if there is the possibility of transmission occurring within the facility (i.e. person with suspect or confirmed COVID-19). Medical-grade surgical masks also serve as source control, and may be more effective than a cloth face covering for this purpose, but a cloth face covering is likely adequate in most settings where there is not confirmed or suspect COVID-19 transmission.

Mask Recommendations for all Long Term Care Facilities:

- All nonresidents within the facility are required to wear a [mask for source control](#) at all times for the duration of the state emergency. This applies to healthcare personnel, administrative staff, environmental service workers, and any other individual entering the facility.
 - Healthcare personnel and anyone in direct patient care should wear a surgical face mask.
 - A cloth face covering may be appropriate for source control for visitors, if surgical masks are in critical shortage.
- Residents should wear a surgical or cloth facemask when outside of their rooms and when staff enter their rooms.
 - A cloth face covering may be appropriate for source control for residents, if there are no suspect or confirmed COVID-19 cases in the facility.
- Residents who regularly leave the facility for essential purposes should wear a surgical facemask when outside of the facility (for personal protection).

Limited surgical facemask supply:

When a surgical facemask is recommended for personal protection, but supplies of surgical facemasks are limited, see CDC's [contingency and crisis capacity strategies](#) for facemask shortages. In summary:

- If surgical facemask supply is limited, first consider [contingency capacity](#) strategies:
 - i. Implement extended-use of surgical facemasks
 - ii. Restrict surgical facemasks to use by healthcare personnel rather than residents for source control. Have residents use cloth face coverings.

- Consider [crisis capacity](#) strategies if necessary:
 - i. Use surgical facemasks beyond their shelf life.
 - ii. Implement limited re-use of surgical facemasks.
 - iii. Prioritize facemasks for selected activities.
- When no surgical facemasks are available, consider use of cloth face coverings among other strategies outlined in the [CDC’s facemask optimization](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are you recommending universal facemasks in LTCF and ALFs now?

There is increased evidence that people without symptoms may be able to spread the virus, and that droplets produced when breathing, speaking, coughing, or sneezing may spread COVID-19 from person-to-person. This universal facemask recommendation is only one aspect of preventing transmission in LTC and AL facilities. Facilities should review all [NH DPHS](#) and [CMS recommendations](#), which include appropriate screening and testing, full PPE use when caring for COVID-19 positive residents, consistent staffing assignment, cohorting, restricting resident movement, cancelling communal activities, and practicing physical distancing and good hand hygiene.

What is a cloth face covering?

A cloth face covering is any well-secured cloth (like a bandana, scarf, or homemade mask) that covers your mouth and nose. A face covering is not considered personal protective equipment (PPE) but is instead used for “source control”: it does not adequately protect the wearer, but can protect others in case the wearer is pre-symptomatically or asymptotically shedding SARS-CoV-2 virus. Cloth face coverings are recommended for source control to preserve PPE. For more information about how to wear and make cloth face coverings, see the [CDC website](#).

How to wear a cloth face covering:

Cloth 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.
- be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

How to clean cloth face coverings:

Facilities should clean cloth face coverings daily using a washing machine and detergent. Cloth face coverings should be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape. Facilities should collect face coverings from staff at the end of each shift and launder if possible.

Remove and store it properly and safely.

- Wash or sanitize your hands before touching your face and removing a face covering or mask.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose and mouth when removing it.
- Immediately wash your hands after removing it.
- Don’t put it where others can touch it or on counter tops or tables.

- To temporarily store a mask between uses, place in a clean, sealable paper bag or breathable container.

Make your own.

Several instructions and sewing patterns exist online for how to make your own cloth face coverings. CDC has [instructions](#) that include several different methods, including machine or hand-sewn, a no-sew method with a t-shirt and scissors, and a no-sew method with a bandana.

Additional resources:

- [NH DHPS Guidance for Long Term Care Facilities](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Independent Living and Retirement Communities](#)
- [CDC Universal Source Control Guidance](#)
- [CMS COVID-19 Long-Term Care Facility Guidance](#)