

# CLOTH FACE COVERINGS IN SCHOOLS

## *What Families Need to Know*

A cloth face covering covers the nose and mouth while being secured to the head with ties or straps, or simply wrapped around the lower face. This document provides answers to some questions on how to effectively use and clean cloth face coverings. The CDC and DHS offer additional information on cloth face coverings and how to properly wear one.

### **Who should wear cloth face coverings?**



Cloth face coverings are strongly recommended for both students and staff who are able to wear and remove them properly. Cloth face coverings can help prevent the wearer from spreading disease if they are asymptomatic (do not show any symptoms) or do not realize they are sick.

However, there are valid concerns that may prevent an individual from wearing one safely. Cloth face coverings should NOT be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the covering without assistance. Medical considerations, including autism spectrum disorder and respiratory conditions, as well as traumatic personal experiences, mean that some individuals are not able to wear a face covering safely. Wearing a cloth face covering may be dangerous or stressful for individuals with disabilities and young children. Individuals may also not be able to wear a face covering safely due to racial profiling or discrimination. Access to clean, appropriate, or multiple face coverings may also be a barrier.

### **How do I talk to my kids about why some people may not be able to wear a face covering?**

This is a good opportunity to talk to your children about trauma, racism and discrimination, as well as the need for acceptance, understanding, and empathy regarding the reasons it may not be safe for everyone to wear a cloth face covering. Another opportunity for family discussion is the topic of protecting the health of friends, stressing that it is important for people who are able to wear a cloth face covering to do whatever they can to protect people who are less able to do so. Make sure kids understand that it isn't their job to enforce wearing or not wearing face coverings.



## What is the rationale behind using the cloth face coverings?



Current recommendations support wearing cloth face coverings in public spaces where you are not able to stay at least 6 feet apart from others. Cloth face coverings help reduce the chance that you will spread the disease to others if you are asymptomatic or do not realize you are sick. This is because the coverings reduce the release of infectious particles into the air if the wearer speaks, coughs, or sneezes. It is important to note that cloth face coverings do NOT completely prevent the wearer from exposure to infectious particles, especially if you are in close contact with an infected person or if the person is not wearing their own mask.

The more we can help to slow down spread of disease, the more we help in terms of:

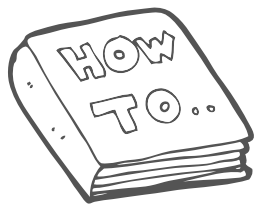
- Helping our community by protecting those most at-risk or vulnerable and reducing the burden on our health care system.
- Preventing the disruption of our children's education by reducing the likelihood of having mass absences or switching to virtual learning.
- Helping our economy to get back on its feet by reducing both disease spread and the likelihood of rolling back phases or increasing restrictions.

## It seems that the recommendations keep changing—why should my kid wear a face covering?

At this time, the research suggests that wearing a cloth face covering can make a real impact on disease transmission and reduce the risk of spread. It is true that the research has evolved on this topic, and that is because doctors, scientists, and public health professionals are learning more and more about COVID-19 as they continue to treat, study, and track it. We acknowledge that cloth face coverings can be uncomfortable and inconvenient, but they are a valuable tool that we have control over to help decrease the risk of spread and keep our communities safer. Emphasizing this with children and talking to them about how we can all play a role in protecting each other can help make it easier for families to wear cloth face coverings. Further, stressing that every little bit counts and that mistakes (like forgetting to pull the face covering up all the way) are okay as long as they are committed to wearing it. Just like so many topics in childhood, there may still be accidents and mistakes as children learn and adapt to something new, but anytime a cloth face covering is worn, it can help reduce the potential of spreading COVID-19.



## How do you wear a cloth face covering?



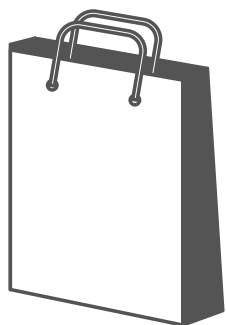
A cloth face covering should cover the nose and mouth, fit snugly on the face, and be secured in place via ear loops or strings that tie behind the head. Avoid touching the cloth face covering, especially if hands have not been washed recently.

## When do you need to change a cloth face covering?

The same cloth face covering should not be worn more than a single day to allow for adequate cleaning. If the cloth face covering becomes soiled or damaged, more frequent changing is advised. The availability of multiple face coverings may be needed. The possibility of cloth face coverings becoming soiled or damaged should be considered as a likely scenario, especially for younger students. Schools should work with communities and families to try to provide extra face coverings for these kinds of situations.



## How do you wash a cloth face covering? If you don't have regular access to a washing machine, what is the best way to wash a cloth face covering?



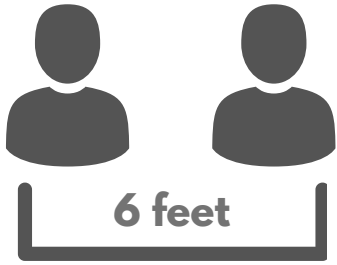
It's a good idea to wash your cloth face covering frequently as they should not be worn longer than one day before needing to be washed. Store them in a designated bag or bin until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. If you are unable to machine wash the cloth face covering, wash it by hand with laundry detergent and hot water before air drying. Re-wearing a cloth face covering without washing it is not advised.

## How do you care for your skin when wearing a cloth face covering regularly?

Wash face often, preferably directly before and after each use of the face covering, and apply moisturizer to decrease friction and reduce irritation. Wear a clean mask.



## How can I make wearing a cloth face covering most effective?



Properly worn cloth face coverings help to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air when the wearer speaks, coughs, or sneezes. However, they are not a replacement for physical distancing and handwashing and should be used alongside other best practices. Our best defense against COVID-19 is practicing good public health: washing our hands frequently; avoiding touching our eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands; avoiding being around sick people; and physical distancing (at least 6 feet apart) from others, especially people we don't live with.

## RESOURCES

### **CDC Recommendations on Cloth Face Covers**

[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html)

### **DHS Information on Cloth Face Covers**

[www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/protect.htm](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/protect.htm)



**WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT  
of HEALTH SERVICES**

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