Face Coverings

The University wants to help campus community members remain healthy, and so it is providing the following guidance on face coverings.

Overview

Face coverings must be worn by all members of the campus community, whether vaccinated or not, while indoors on URI property unless doing so would damage their health. Students may remove their masks when in their dorm rooms but must wear their masks elsewhere. Employees may remove their mask while working alone in their assigned office or solo workspace but must wear them at all other times.

Given the unique challenges of our higher education environment, some aspects of these guidelines exceed minimum requirements set by the State of RI and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). All members of the campus community must comply with the University’s guidelines as provided herein. Individuals will not be admitted to university-controlled buildings or University events without face coverings. IMPORTANT: The university prohibits any employee from entering the workplace if they refuse to wear a face covering when state regulations or university policies requires them to do so.

NOTE: For purposes of these URI requirements, the term “visitors” includes faculty, staff, students, affiliates, visitors, vendors/contractors, and all others who are not current students or employees of the University.

Types of face coverings

To stop the potential spread of coronavirus to others, the CDC stipulates that face coverings should have two or more layers and be secured over the nose and mouth as well as under the chin. NOTE: The CDC does not recommend the use of gaiters or face shields. Evaluation of these face covers is ongoing, but effectiveness is unknown at this time.

Please note the following general guidance regarding use of face coverings, surgical masks, and N95 respirators:

• A cloth face covering is typically a reusable item made from cloth fabric. It helps prevent the wearer from spreading illnesses they may be carrying but may not protect the wearer. A cloth face covering should be laundered in a washing machine daily after use. Based on recent studies, it is strongly recommended that you avoid using gaiters/buffs as your face covering and opt for a sewn cloth mask with three layers for increased protection for you and your fellow URI community members.

• A disposable surgical mask is a disposable face covering that is the recommended appropriate protection for most community members. A surgical mask helps prevent the wearer from inhaling droplets exhaled by others. Surgical masks should be discarded in an appropriate receptacle at the end of the day.

• A KN95 mask is a type of filtering facepiece respirator that are commonly made in China and is similar to the N95 masks used in the United States. KN95’s offer a higher level of protection than a disposable surgical mask but are not equivalent to a test fitted N95 respirator. Note that KN95 masks should only be used if they meet requirements similar to NIOSH standards for respirators. (The CDC warns that about 60% of KN95 masks sold in the United States are counterfeit (fake) and do not meet NIOSH requirements.)
• An **N95 respirator** is a device evaluated, tested and approved to reduce the wearer’s exposure to fine particles, and is the respiratory protection of choice for units dealing with COVID-19 patients. An N95 respirator is tight fitting and must be fit-tested. N95 respirators are not appropriate or necessary for most employees and should be reserved for health care workers and emergency responders in contact with individuals who are ill and are also needed by facilities maintenance personnel while performing specific tasks that generate fine dust. **NOTE:** An N95 respirator with an exhaust valve is not suitable for preventing transmission of COVID-19 and is not an acceptable face covering for purposes of this policy.

**IMPORTANT:** Based on current CDC guidance, the University strongly recommends that individuals use disposable surgical masks at minimum. Cloth face coverings help prevent you from exhaling the virus that causes COVID-19 but may not sufficiently protect you from inhaling droplets spread by others.

**Obtaining face coverings**

**Students** should bring their own face coverings from home, or they may obtain disposable surgical masks or KN95* respirators by contacting their hall director, house manager (Greek housing), employer (student employees), or Health Services.

**Employees** will be provided disposable surgical masks or KN95* respirators by their supervisor upon request. University departments may obtain these face coverings through the COVID-19 Task Force. More information is available [here](#).

**Visitors** to Kingston Campus may obtain disposable surgical masks at the Welcome Center or from the individual department they are visiting.

All students and employees who are issued reusable cloth masks are responsible for washing them daily (see below).

*KN95 respirators are subject to availability*

**Use and care of face coverings**

For additional guidance on using masks and face coverings effectively, see the CDC guide [Improve How Your Mask Protects You](#).

**Putting on the face covering/disposable mask**

- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer prior to handling the face covering/disposable mask.
- Ensure the face-covering/disposable mask fits over the nose and under the chin.
- Situate the face-covering/disposable mask properly with nose wire snug against the nose (where applicable).
- Tie straps behind the head and neck or loop around the ears.
- Throughout the process: Avoid touching the front of the face covering/disposable mask.

**Taking off the face covering/disposable mask**

- Use hand sanitizer.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth when removing the face covering/disposable mask.
- When taking off the face covering/disposable mask, loop your finger into the strap and pull the strap away from the ear, or untie the straps.
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• Wash hands immediately after removing.

Wearing double masks

• Additional protection against COVID-19 may be provided by wearing a disposable mask underneath a cloth mask. It’s important that the disposable mask be fitted as tightly as possible (see above) and then the cloth mask applied over it so that the second mask pushes the edges of the inner mask against your face.
• Do not combine two disposable masks as this will not improve fit/protection.
• Do not combine a KN95 mask with any other mask. The KN95 is designed to be used on its own.
• Double masking is not required to satisfy the provisions of URI’s mask policy.

Care, storage and laundering

• Keep face coverings/disposable masks stored in a paper bag when not in use.
• Cloth face coverings may not be used more than one day at a time and must be washed after use. Cloth face coverings should be properly laundered with regular clothing detergent before first use, and after each shift. Cloth face coverings should be replaced immediately if soiled, damaged (e.g. ripped, punctured) or visibly contaminated.
• Disposable masks must not be used for more than one day and should be placed in the trash after your shift or if it is soiled, damaged (e.g., stretched ear loops, torn or punctured material) or visibly contaminated.

Exceptions to requirements for face coverings

Such protective face coverings are not required for certain individuals, per CDC guidance, or for:

• Anyone for whom use of such face covering would be damaging to his or her health;
• Anyone who is developmentally unable to use such face covering, including young children who may not be able to effectively wear a face mask;
• A person undergoing a medical or dental procedure;
• When a face covering would inhibit an activity of daily living (e.g. eating);
• A face covering would impede communication by or with a person who has a hearing impediment; or
• When a face covering would itself negatively impact the safety of an individual or lead to an increased risk of harm to others (e.g. near open flames).

In addition, face coverings are not required for any person when:

• **Outdoors** (Note that unvaccinated individuals must still maintain three (3) feet of physical distance from others.)
• **Working alone in an office or at a job site.**
• **Consuming food or drink.** You should wear your mask or face covering until you are ready to eat and then replace it afterward. Individuals should maintain three (3) feet of physical distance while eating.

For approved **musical and theatrical performances**, and associated rehearsals, performers may remove face coverings provided they maintain three (3) feet of physical distance from each other and the audience.

Individuals **playing the recorder, woodwind, brass, or other air instruments** who would otherwise be unable to play due to the requirement that they wear face coverings that cover the nose and mouth, are permitted
to wear modified face coverings specifically designed to accommodate access to the instrument’s mouthpiece. These modified face coverings must include a flap that covers the opening for the mouth for the purpose of preventing the spread of airborne diseases while playing these instruments.

For official photography and videography under the direction of the University’s Communications & Marketing team, subjects may remove face coverings provided they maintain three (3) feet of physical distance from each other and photographers, camera crews, and others present at the shoot. NOTE: Subjects who are members of the same household may be photographed together without face coverings (e.g., an alumna and their spouse.)

During public speaking engagements, the speaker may remove their mask while speaking provided they maintain three (3) feet of physical distance from others. NOTE: This does not apply to lectures or teaching environments.

Faculty seeking exceptions based on pedagogical needs may submit a request to their college dean, who must agree to the exception and then obtain approval from the Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Budget.

Employees that require more extensive facial coverings due to industry specific safety regulations, laws or guidelines should continue to comply with the PPE requirements outlined within their respective industry-specific laws, regulations, and guidelines (i.e. medical professionals, professionals who use respiratory equipment, and professionals who handle hazardous waste.) Any exceptions to face covering requirements for researchers must be approved by the Office of Research Integrity and incorporated in that researcher’s laboratory safety plan.

Reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities

Students who are unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition should request a reasonable accommodation through URI Health Services patient portal and complete the COVID request for accommodation. A committee, consisting of Health Services and Disability Student Services will review each request and work with the student to develop a strategy for the health and wellbeing of the student and the URI community.

Employees who are unable to wear face coverings due to a medical condition should request a reasonable accommodation through Human Resources. More information can be found here.