

Face Coverings

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

Overview

Regardless of vaccination status, face coverings are now optional on all areas of URI's campuses except indoor locations where direct academic instruction or research is taking place and certain other locations indicated below. Masks are still required in all classrooms, laboratories, and those spaces where direct academic instruction and research are taking place, unless the professor or staff member expressly waives that requirement.

Given the unique challenges of our higher education environment, aspects of these guidelines may 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.

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.

Locations where face coverings are required

Except as provided for below (see Exceptions), face coverings are required in the following locations:

- **Indoor locations where direct academic instruction or research is taking place** (e.g., classrooms, lecture halls, laboratories) unless the professor or staff member expressly waives that requirement
- **Campus healthcare facilities**, including but not limited to URI Health Services and physical therapy offices
- **Campus transportation** including the Rhody Shuttle system and the Disability, Access, and Inclusion shuttle
- **Other locations determined by the COVID-19 Task Force** and marked "Face Covering Required"

Face coverings are optional in all other campus locations. However, continued use of face coverings is still encouraged for those who are immunocompromised, at high risk for severe disease, have children or others in their home who cannot be vaccinated, or are for any other reason wearing a mask. Additionally, an employee with an individually assigned, enclosed office may *request* that guests wear a mask while in their office; if guests decline, another meeting location should be sought.

IMPORTANT: University departments and programs may not implement additional requirements for face coverings without specific approval from the URI COVID-19 Task Force. When seeking such approval, the requesting department must demonstrate a significantly elevated risk of transmission.

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.

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.

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.

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.

**KN95 respirators are subject to availability*

Exceptions

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 **actively 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 courses**, performers may remove face coverings provided they maintain three (3) feet of physical distance from each other and any audience present.

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.

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](#).