

****COVID-19 HEALTH ALERT****

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Health Alert 010 – Recommendations Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings

Scientific evidence available to date indicates that asymptomatic and presymptomatic shedding of the virus that causes COVID-19 is occurring. This means that people who have no symptoms whatsoever may be infected with the virus and capable of transmitting the virus to others when interacting in close proximity—for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing. This heightens the need for community-wide implementation of control measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among people who are not experiencing symptoms of illness.

The primary ways to do this are through social distancing, frequent hand-washing, and disinfecting high-touch surfaces. Another tool that may help to minimize transmission while people are around others outside of their household is the use of face coverings. Because we are experiencing a nationwide shortage of medical supplies, including facemasks, we recommend that Alaskans make their own face coverings and wear them in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) -- especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. This recommendation aligns with current national guidance: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html

The following measures are highly recommended for all Alaskans:

- Wear a cloth face covering in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies).
- Make sure the face covering covers both the nose and mouth.
- Do not remove the face covering until you return home.
- When removing the face covering, avoid touching the front of the face covering (because it may be contaminated). Remove it by grasping the ear loops, ties, or bands and immediately discard or place in a designated container for laundering.
- *Wash your hands immediately* after removing the face covering and before touching anything else.
- Wash face coverings in hot, soapy water between uses.
- Do not wear N-95 or surgical masks; these are needed by health care workers and first responders.
- Do not rely on face coverings as the primary way to prevent COVID-19 transmission, and be careful to avoid developing a false sense of security through the use of face coverings. Continue to follow social distancing measures, including maintaining at least

six feet between yourself and others, staying at home, avoiding touching your face, and washing your hands frequently.

What is a cloth face covering? A cloth face covering is a material that covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with ties or straps or simply wrapped around the lower face. It can be made of a variety of materials, such as cotton, silk, or linen. A cloth face covering may be factory-made or sewn by hand, or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels.

How do I make a homemade face coverings? Cloth face coverings can be fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low cost. There are a number of instructional websites and videos that people can refer to for making face coverings; two such videos are available at <https://youtu.be/VgHrnS6n4iA> and <https://youtu.be/1r2C1zGUHbU>

How well do cloth face coverings work to prevent spread of COVID-19? There is limited evidence available on how well cloth face coverings help reduce COVID-19 transmission. Their primary role is to reduce the release of respiratory droplets into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes, including people who have COVID-19 but have no symptoms. Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing and washing hands and staying home when ill, but they may be helpful when combined with these primary interventions.

How should I care for a cloth face covering? Wash your cloth face covering frequently, ideally after each use, or at least daily. Have a bag or bin to keep cloth face coverings in until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. If you must re-wear your cloth face covering before washing, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. Discard cloth face coverings that:

- No longer cover the nose and mouth
- Have stretched out or damaged ties or straps
- Cannot stay on the face
- Have holes or tears in the fabric

This is not a mandate.
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