**May 24, 2020**

## Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19):
## Guidance about Masks and Cloth Face Coverings for the General Public

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 requires that everyone in our community be mindful and vigilant about staying safe. This means finding ways to protect yourself, your family, and community, while also making sure that your frontline healthcare workers and first responders have the supplies they need (such as N95 respirators and medical facemasks) to keep themselves and the community safe.

Below are recommendations that the general public should follow when using cloth face coverings to help protect others in the community from COVID-19. **Please remember, the use of cloth face coverings does not eliminate the need for social distancing and staying at home when you're sick**. Please visit https://coronavirus.dc.gov/ to get the most up-to-date information.

### So many kinds! What's the difference?
- **Respirators (sometimes called an N95 respirator):** These should be reserved for healthcare workers or other professionals whose job tasks require their use.

- **Medical facemasks (also called surgical or procedure masks):** These are used by healthcare workers, other professionals whose job tasks require their use, or sometimes members of the public who receive instruction from their healthcare provider.

- **Cloth face coverings (such as homemade cloth masks, store-bought fabric masks, bandanas, etc.):** Members of the general public should use cloth face coverings, which help to protect others and slow the spread of the virus. Cloth face coverings prevent the person who is wearing it from spreading respiratory droplets when talking, coughing, or sneezing.

### When to Use a Cloth Face Covering
- Cloth face coverings are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand hygiene with store-bought alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

- You should wear a cloth face covering if:
  - you are taking care of a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19;
  - you are entering a healthcare provider's office;
  - you are entering a public setting, especially where social distancing is difficult to maintain, such as the grocery store or pharmacy; or
  - you are having respiratory symptoms, such as coughing or sneezing.
    - If you are not able to wear a cloth face covering (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then you should do your best to cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. People who are caring for you should wear a cloth face covering if they are around you.

### How to Use and Care for Cloth Face Coverings
- Before putting on a cloth face covering, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Cloth face coverings should cover your nose and mouth and fit snugly against the sides of your face.

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- Avoid touching the cloth face covering while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Do not put your cloth face covering around your neck or up on your forehead.
- Remove your cloth face covering and replace with another if it becomes visibly dirty, wet, or difficult to breathe through.
- **To remove the cloth face covering:**
    - Handle it by the string ties or ear loops only. Untie the strings behind your head or stretch the ear loops, and remove. Avoid touching the dirty part (do not touch the front of the cloth face covering).
    - Fold outside corners together (so the outside part is folded into itself).
    - Place in a hamper or washing machine. You can include your cloth face covering in your regular laundry, using the warmest appropriate water setting and drying it using the highest heat setting.
    - Clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water immediately after removing the face covering.

**Who Shouldn't Use Cloth Face Coverings?**
- Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children younger than 2 years of age, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.

**Keep in Mind**
- Please don't purchase N95 respirators (unless required for your job).
- Medical facemasks may be in short supply and they should be saved for healthcare workers and others who need them to stay safe on the job.
- Social distancing and staying at home when you're sick are still the most important measures to help prevent others from getting COVID-19.