Face Mask Use and the Spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) FAQs

As the pandemic progresses, researchers are learning more ways to help keep people safe from the virus that causes COVID-19. This includes learning how the virus can be spread – through person-to-person contact and through contaminated respiratory droplets, known as aerosols. Based on the most recent available information, it is now recommended by the CDC to use face masks to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

As part of our ongoing response efforts to keep our employees and their families safe, we wanted to share critical insights from Dr. David Hamer, a professor at the Boston University Schools of Public Health and Medicine, regarding the use of face masks and COVID-19. Below you can find Frequently Asked Questions, information and safety tips that will be useful in making and wearing face masks to protect yourself and others.

Is COVID-19 spread through the air?

- The virus that causes COVID-19 is still under intense research, but it is understood that respiratory droplets from infected individuals can travel at least a few feet through the air to other persons within close contact. In the absence of good circulation, the virus can linger in aerosols in a room for up to 3 hours.

Is wearing a face mask recommended?

- The CDC recently revised its recommendation on wearing face masks, noting that people infected with COVID-19 can spread the virus even though there is no sign of symptoms. As a result, the CDC advices that cloth face coverings should be worn "whenever people must go into public settings."
- For more from the CDC, please visit: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html.

Should a healthy individual wear a face mask?

- Yes. Any healthy individuals should wear a face mask if expected to be in close contact to others, especially if they will be caring for or around people exposed to COVID-19. This means persons caring for individuals at home, as well as health care and social workers, should wear a mask.
- In addition, it is possible to be infected with COVID-19 but not show any symptoms. Wearing a face mask will help prevent any infected individuals from spreading the virus.

Should a face mask be worn if COVID-19 is contracted?

- Yes. Any individuals exposed to or have contracted COVID-19 should wear a mask to help prevent the spread of contaminated droplets to others. Wearing a face mask over the mouth and nose will help prevent the spread of the virus through a cough or sneeze.

Can COVID-19 still be contracted if a face mask is worn?

- Yes. The use of a face mask is a recommended measure to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, and it may help prevent individuals from contracting the virus. Contaminated droplets can still be contracted through the eyes, for example, and we know that person-to-person contact or touching exposed surfaces and objects can spread the virus.

Can social gatherings be attended if a face mask is worn?

- No. Social distancing should still be practiced at all times to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and wearing a face mask is one additional measure to ensure public health.

Are there specific types of face masks that are recommended?

- It is recommended to use homemade cloth face coverings. There is no need to buy any specific type of face mask since any fabric found at home will be useful.

- It is also recommended to avoid buying and using surgical face masks and N95 respirators because these items are in short supply worldwide and need to be reserved for medical field workers and emergency first responders.

- A Wake Forest Institute for Regenerative Medicine team tested different masks made by community volunteers and found these types are the best-performing:
  - Two layers of high-quality, heavyweight "quilter's" cotton with a thread count of 180 or more.
  - A double-layer mask with a simple cotton outer layer and an inner flannel layer.

- A Cambridge University study compared filtration and breathability of different types of homemade mask materials and found that masks made from pillowcases or cotton T-shirts struck the best balance.

What is the proper way to use a face mask?

- When using a face mask, there are several factors to keep in mind in order to keep the face mask free of contaminants:
  - Make sure to wash hands for 20-30 seconds with soap and water before putting on the face mask.
  - Try to not touch eyes, nose, and mouth when removing the mask.
  - Remove the face mask from the back of the face or the sides since the front of the face mask could be contaminated with SARS-CoV-2.
  - Be sure to wash hands immediately after removing the face mask.

How can a face mask be made at home?

- The CDC provides a step-by-step tutorial on how to make a cloth face mask from fabrics at home. The directions are online at: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html

Should the face mask be washed?

- Yes. It is highly recommended to regularly wash a face mask after use. The use of a washing machine with detergent should effectively clean and disinfect it.