FAQs ON THE USE OF CLOTH FACE COVERINGS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

These Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) accompany the Division of Public Health (DPH)’s guidance document that provides information about the use of cloth face coverings by the public when outside of the home and performing essential activities. Consistent with the Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC), DPH recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies). **This is a recommendation not a requirement.** It is also not a substitute for existing guidance about handwashing and social distancing. **It’s important to note that the primary purpose of wearing a cloth face covering is not to protect yourself – it is to protect others.**

GENERAL

**Q: Why is DPH recommending wearing cloth face coverings?**

A: There is limited evidence to suggest that public use of cloth face coverings during a pandemic helps reduce disease transmission. The primary role of using cloth face coverings during a pandemic is to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes, including someone who has COVID-19 but may not show symptoms. **Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for washing hands, physical distancing while performing essential activities, and staying home, but they may be helpful when combined with these actions.**

**Q: Do I still need to practice other public health measures if I wear a cloth face covering?**

A: The best defense against COVID-19 is frequent hand washing, avoiding being around sick people, staying home/physical distancing, and avoiding touching your face, mouth, eyes, and nose with unwashed hands.

There may be a benefit to reducing asymptomatic transmission and reinforcing physical distancing through the use of cloth face coverings. However, cloth face coverings may increase risk if users reduce their use of other protective measures, such as physical distancing and frequent hand washing, when using cloth face coverings.

**Q: What type of cloth face covering should I wear and/or recommend that my staff wear?**

A: Members of the general public may consider using a cloth face covering that fully 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. Research has shown that certain more densely-woven fabrics may be more effective. 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.

**Q: What are some examples of cloth face coverings?**
A: The Surgeon General provides guidance on some sample cloth face coverings:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPx1yqvJgf4&feature=emb_title

Beebe Healthcare offers guidelines and a printable pattern:
https://www.beebehealthcare.org/donation-items-covid-19-relief

The Washington Post’s video also includes step-by-step instructions:

**Q: Should I seek out surgical masks or medical grade masks?**

A: This guidance is for the use of cloth face coverings only. Members of the general public are not recommended to use medical/surgical masks, as doing so could further endanger critically low levels of personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare personnel.

**Staff Use of Cloth Face Coverings**

**Q: If we are working in an office setting, should I or my staff wear a cloth face covering all day?**

A: You are encouraged to wear a cloth face covering when you are interacting with others in an office setting, as well as maintaining a distance of six feet or more. If you are working alone in an office, a cloth face covering is not necessary.

**Q: Which school staff should wear a cloth face covering during their normal job duties?**

A: School staff are encouraged to wear a cloth face covering when engaging in tasks or duties that require or involve interactions with other staff, families, or students, such as distributing meals or school materials and resources, and it is difficult to maintain a distance of six feet from others. Wearing a cloth face covering does not eliminate the need to physically distance from others.

**Q: Should staff involved in food preparation wear a cloth face covering while preparing food?**

A: Currently, there is no evidence that COVID-19 is spread through food. However, DPH recommends that you consider wearing a cloth face covering if you are working in proximity to others, though you should continue to maintain a distance of at least six feet from others and continue to follow standard food safety preparation procedures, such as frequent handwashing.

**Q: Should school facilities staff or those cleaning school buildings and offices wear cloth face coverings while they engage in their work?**

A: If staff members are working with others, they are encouraged to wear a cloth face covering and continue to engage in physical distancing.
Cloth Face Covering Practices

Q: How should I care for a cloth face covering?

A: DPH recommends:

1) Washing your hands before you put on your cloth face covering.
2) When removing the cloth face covering, DPH recommends not touching the front of the cloth face covering to the extent possible and using a bag or bin to store cloth face coverings until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle.
3) Washing your hands immediately after removing your cloth face covering.
4) Washing the cloth face covering frequently, ideally after each use, or at least daily with detergent and hot water and dry on a hot cycle.
5) If you must re-wear your cloth face covering before washing, washing your hands immediately after putting it back on or adjusting the cloth face covering.
6) Discarding cloth face coverings that:

   - Have stretched out or damaged ties or straps
   - No longer cover the mouth and nose
   - Don’t stay on the face
   - Have any rips or holes in the fabric

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:


Office of the Surgeon General

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPxB1yqyJgf4&feature=emb_title

California Department of Public Health:

https://www.edph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Face-Coverings-Guidance.aspx