

SFVAHCS COVID-19 Pandemic Face Mask/Face Covering and Eye Protection Policy

July 27, 2020

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) response to provide a safe environment for employees and Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic has included personal protective equipment (PPE), hand hygiene, physical distancing, screening for symptoms of disease, testing, exposure and contact tracing, appropriate enhanced cleaning and disinfection.

Source control for a health care facility involves the use of a face covering on all individuals entering a facility, whether employees, patients, or visitors.

Surgical masks are mandatory for all staff in all patient care areas. Staff NOT working in patient care areas, patients, and companions must use acceptable face coverings at a minimum. Refer to guidance on cloth face covering.

Unit supervisors or service chiefs should request supplies from the Logistics workgroup email: VHASFCSupplyChainCommodities@va.gov

Face covering/mask guidance for ALL individuals entering SFVAHCS facilities:

- All individuals (staff, trainees, volunteers, Veterans, inpatient residents, and visitors) entering SFVAHCS campuses, including CBOCs, must have a face covering and will complete the screening procedure.
- Individuals working in non-clinical areas have the option to bring their own face covering/face mask or be provided one by VHA for the duration of their time on campus.
- If veterans approach the screening station without any kind of face covering, they will be given masks. They will put it on themselves if they are able or ask for help if they are not, answer the questions, sanitize their hands, and enter the building.
- When patients present to the screeners with medical documentation (i.e. provider's note) clearly stating they do NOT have to wear a mask secondary to a medical condition, they should be offered face shields.
- Surgical masks will be available in the clinic for providers to give to patients who arrive with cloth face coverings or masks when there is increased risk of viral transmission due to the nature of the visit, (e.g. prolonged time in close proximity, nature of the physical exam, etc.).
- Face masks and respirators with exhalation valves do not protect others because they allow unfiltered breath and droplets into the air. Visitors or staff who bring their own masks with exhalation valves must either use a surgical mask or acceptable face covering instead or place a surgical mask or acceptable face covering over their existing mask that covers the exhalation valve. VHA can provide the appropriate mask or face covering.
- Mask or acceptable face covering should be worn outside when standing in line to enter the building.
- Every effort should be made to keep masks clean and dry. If they become wet or soiled, they should be replaced.
- Perform [hand hygiene](#) prior to putting on a mask, periodically while wearing the mask

and/or if you touch the mask, and after mask removal.

Guidance for all staff, trainees, and volunteers:

- Staff are **required** to wear eye protection (face shield or goggles) during patient encounters, **in clinical areas (e.g. workstations in the ED or ICU) and** when entering areas that are frequently occupied by staff (EMS cleaning rooms, Kitchen staff delivering food, etc.).
- **Masks should be worn in office spaces unless you have that space to yourself for hours to days at a time.**
- **Staff may remove surgical masks or face coverings when alone in private offices.**
- Staff may choose to bring their own eye protection or obtain one from their supervisor or unit.
- For purposes of routine daily use, either goggles OR full face shields are considered adequate eye protection.
- Eye protection should be cleaned with a sanitizing wipe when removed, and can be re-used as long as it works properly.
- When providing care to a patient with known or suspected COVID-19, or when participating in the performance of an aerosol generating procedure, follow the current Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidelines for the appropriate care scenario.
- Do not use your “daily” face mask for care of COVID-19/PUI patients.
- Surgical face mask(s) used should be discarded daily by clinical staff. Please properly and safely dispose of your used PPE in trash receptacles. Do not throw items on the ground.
- Outdoor use of face masks: when outside at the SFVAMC all staff must abide by San Francisco city guidance and use face coverings when within 30 feet of others:
<https://sf.gov/information/masks-and-face-coverings-coronavirus-pandemic>

Guidance for hospitalized patients and inpatient staff:

- All inpatients will be provided with a surgical mask to be worn during all clinical encounters. Patients will be encouraged to wear their surgical masks at all times when other people are present.
- Patients must wear their masks when leaving their rooms.
- Those patients with medical or behavioral problems that make wearing a mask difficult or impossible will be exempted from the above guidance.
- Eye protection is required for staff during all patient encounters, and **MUST** be worn when any of the following apply:
 - patients are not masked
 - patients have not yet had negative COVID-19 testing during this hospitalization
 - patients are high risk; this includes patients undergoing aerosol generating procedures and those with known or suspected COVID-19. **In these cases, additional PPE should be used as per SFVA Infection Control and VHA Moving Forward guidance.**

Guidance on cloth face coverings:

Cloth face coverings should:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include multiple layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction
- be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape
- must be laundered daily

If the face covering does not meet these guidelines, individuals should be given a surgical mask or other face covering by the VA.

Individuals should be informed to be careful when removing their face covering and not to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth when removing their face covering. Individuals should wash their hands immediately after removing their face covering. Information on face coverings from the CDC can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

Care and appropriate use of face masks:

- To reduce waste and protect our inventory, one face mask should be worn for the entire day, whenever possible.
- Proper placement technique should be used to obtain optimal protection and prevent slippage. Do not wear around neck or hanging from an ear.
- Proper [hand hygiene](#) (washing or disinfectant) should be performed before donning the mask, before removing the mask, and after mask removal.
- Avoid touching the mask or face to reduce self-contamination. If you do touch the mask, perform [hand hygiene](#).
- Every effort should be made to keep the mask clean and dry. If the mask is removed for eating or drinking, place it face down on a paper towel or in a paper bag to keep it clean. If the mask becomes wet or soiled, it should be replaced.
- Dispose of the mask at the end of the day in proper trash receptacle.
- Face masks or N-95 respirators brought from home are not prohibited but should be considered contaminated. Use [hand hygiene](#) as described above during mask use.
- Homemade masks/face coverings will be allowed only in non-patient care areas. Always consider these masks to be contaminated. Use [hand hygiene](#) as described above.

Monitoring and reinforcement of compliance

Recognizing the professionalism and commitment of all our SFVAHCS employees to the welfare and

safety of our veterans, and each other, we anticipate full compliance with this universal masking policy. Nonetheless, we encourage all staff to hold each other accountable, and if there are situations in which an employee or veteran does not appear to be complying with the policy, to gently and respectfully, remind that person of the policy, and the need to keep everyone safe. To assure the safety of all SFVAHCS veterans and staff, situations in which there is reportedly persistent, flagrant, non-health-related violation of the policy by an individual, can lead to corrective, including disciplinary, action.

REFERENCES

- VHA Memorandum 5/1/2020: Update: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Mask Use in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Facilities. [https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/SFC/ic/2019%20Novel%20Corona%20Virus/PPE%20and%20N-95%20respirators/05012020 Update%20Coronavirus%20COVID-19%20Mask%20Use%20in%20VHA%20Facilities%20Signed%20\(002\).pdf](https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/SFC/ic/2019%20Novel%20Corona%20Virus/PPE%20and%20N-95%20respirators/05012020%20Update%20Coronavirus%20COVID-19%20Mask%20Use%20in%20VHA%20Facilities%20Signed%20(002).pdf)
- SF DPH Public Health Emergency Order C19-12b dated 5/28/2020. Generally requiring members of the public and workers to wear face coverings <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/files/Order-C19-12-Face-Coverings.pdf>
- CDC: Using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/using-ppe.html>
- CDC: Infection Control Guidance for Healthcare Professionals about Coronavirus (COVID-19). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control.html>