FOR LABORATORY MEMBERS: FACE COVERINGS, SURGICAL MASKS, AND RESPIRATORS

This fact sheet describes the various forms of respiratory protection used at Yale in the research and non-research environment.

Face Coverings

Following CDC recommendations, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont has ordered face coverings to be worn by anyone in public. Covering your mouth and nose with a mask or simple cloth face covering can slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. A face covering also prevents the wearer from touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Members of the Yale community are expected to comply with the Governor’s order and wear face coverings when outside or in any space that can reasonably be expected to be shared (e.g., common work areas, hallways, and restrooms). A face covering is not required when working alone in segregated spaces (i.e., cubicles with walls, private offices, etc.).

Face coverings or masks appropriate for each individual’s work activities are provided by managers or by Environmental Health & Safety (EHS). Face covering acquired from other sources are acceptable, but they must not have an exhalation valve.

EHS has published guidelines on the use and care of face coverings.

A face covering is not intended to protect the wearer, but it may prevent the spread of virus from the wearer to others. This would be especially important if someone is infected but does not have symptoms.

Surgical Masks for Yale Laboratories

Any person working in a Yale laboratory must also cover their mouth and nose, but with a surgical mask specified by EHS. (Cloth face coverings are not allowed in Yale laboratories.) The exterior of a surgical mask is usually colored and the top has a wire that should be bent over the wearer’s nose.

The surgical mask used in the laboratory should not be worn outside of the laboratory.

In the laboratory, these water-resistant surgical masks will protect others from wearers who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. Because they are water-resistant, surgical masks offer protection from droplets from another person’s breath, speech, or cough. (As described below, ASTM-rated surgical masks are generally reserved for healthcare workers.) In some cases, EHS will provide researchers with other means of respiratory protection specific to their work, such as a KN95 mask, an ASTM surgical mask, an N95 respirator or a powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR).
A face covering or a surgical mask is not a substitute for social distancing. As the CDC stresses, wearing a face mask or covering is an additional public health measure people should take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. You should still stay at least 6 feet away from other people (social distancing) and frequently wash your hands.

**K95 Masks**

KN95 masks are made to standards established by China and other Asian countries. Most do not fit tightly, so they cannot be used as a respirator. They are water resistant, and may be used as a face covering. EHS may specify their use in a research lab because they offer good filtration.

**ASTM Surgical Masks and N95 Respirators**

Surgical masks used by healthcare workers are rated by ASTM for 3 levels of water-resistance. (Level 3 is most water resistant.) EHS may specify their use in clinics, with research animals, or for other research procedures. Surgical masks lacking the ASTM rating appear to be nearly identical to ASTM surgical masks.

N95 respirators are a tight-fitting respirator to protect the wearer from aerosols or other fine particles. EHS may specify their use with research animals or for other research procedures. Individuals who use an N95 respirator must be fit tested at EHS. (Call 203-785-7588 for an appointment.) Following the fit test, EHS will supply the model and size of N95 respirator appropriate for the user.

Both ASTM surgical masks and N95 respirators are in short supply and should be reserved for healthcare workers unless otherwise specified by EHS.

**Powered Air-Purifying Respirator (PAPR)**

For some high risk clinical and research work, EHS has provided powered air-purifying respirators (PAPR). A PAPR is a specialty respirator that provides the wearer with air that has passed through a high efficiency filter.

If you have any questions, please contact EHS at ehs@yale.edu or 203-785-3550.