

Guidelines for Masks in VUMC Research Labs

Why are facemasks required?

COVID-19 spreads primarily through droplets and aerosols generated when an infected person speaks, coughs or sneezes. Those who are infected can spread the virus before symptoms appear; some spread the virus and never develop symptoms. Wearing a facemask helps prevent transmission.

Check the [VUMC Coronavirus web site](#) for current masking requirements, then follow these guidelines when wearing a cloth or non-medical disposable facemask while working in any VUMC research lab.

Put on masks properly.

1. **Wash your hands for a least 20 seconds before you put on a mask.** Anything on your hands can get on your mask, then spread to your mouth and nose. Refer to the **CDC Handwashing Guide** at www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html.
2. Pick up mask by ear loops or straps. If the mask has been worn before and is potentially contaminated, avoid touching the front outside of the mask, and after the mask is on, wash your hands again.
3. Make sure ear loops or straps are not loose to prevent the mask from slipping down your nose.

Wear masks properly.

- Masks must cover the nose and mouth and be fitted at the chin. Bandanas do not provide adequate protection.
- To **avoid contamination of cloth masks when working with hazardous materials**, wear disposable masks or wear a full-length face shield over a cloth mask.

Remove masks properly.

1. Grasp mask by ear loops or straps. Remove so that the outside of the mask does not brush against your face.
2. If the mask is to be worn again later, fold it so the side that has been against your face is on the inside, and the dirty outside part is on the outside. Place in a plastic bag for storage, making sure ear loops or ties are at the top opening.
3. Always wash your hands for at least 20 seconds after removing a mask.

Handle used masks properly.

- Disposable masks that are damaged, soiled or wet should be discarded in regular trash.
- Disposable masks that are not visibly soiled or wet and have not been worn in lab areas where aerosols are generated can be reused. This will be necessary until mask inventory levels have normalized.
- Cloth masks must be laundered before reuse.

Resources:

- Lab Operation Guidelines: COVID-19
www.vumc.org/safety/sites/default/files/public_files/research/research-lab-ramp-up-COVID-19.pdf
- VUMC Coronavirus resources: www.vumc.org/coronavirus
- CDC Coronavirus resources: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/