



Choosing the Best Mask

Effective Tuesday, January 18th new University guidelines are in place for face coverings and masks. **Cloth masks are no longer acceptable ALONE in indoor Columbia University settings**, only when worn over a surgical mask. This Fact Sheet will help to identify the options for respiratory protection to be used while on campus.

Disposable Surgical Masks

- Multi-layer face covering with ear loops and an adjustable nose bridge wire.
- Available on campus, if an individual does not have their own mask.
- Designed and tested to ensure consistent performance (ASTM F3502-21)
- Avoid gaps around the sides of the face or nose. Ear loops can be twisted to tighten the mask. Also see [these tips for better fit!](#)
- **Acceptable for general use on campus.**



N95 Respirator Masks

- N95 respirators are filtering masks that have undergone rigorous inspection and certification set forth by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).
- Designed to create an extremely tight seal around the nose and mouth using elastic headbands and an adjustable metal nose band. Mask material filters 95% of particles at 0.3 microns in size – the most penetrating size – and more at other sizes.
- **N95s labeled "surgical" should be prioritized for health care workers.**



KN95 and KF94 Respirator Masks

- KN95 and KF94 respirator masks are the Chinese and Korean equivalent, respectively, of N95 masks. Even though these masks meet international standards, they are NOT NIOSH approved.
- Designed to create a seal around the nose and mouth, using elastic ear bands, an adjustable metal nose band, and side flaps to create a tight fit. Different styles are available for better fit for different face shapes.
- [Follow CDC guidance to avoid purchasing fraudulent KN95 masks](#), and look for KF94 masks manufactured in S. Korea in order to avoid counterfeits.
- **Suitable for general use on campus.** Not approved for use by healthcare workers.



When to Change? N95/KN95/KF94 respirators are disposable, but not "single use"; they can be worn multiple times. Users must inspect respirators before each use for signs of wear and imminent failure of any part of the respirator. Only reuse N95/KN95/KF94 respirators when 1) the shape of the respirator remains unchanged, 2) the filter material is not physically damaged or soiled, 3) there is no damage to the seal, straps, or nose piece, 4) there are no holes or other signs of wear, tear, or fray, and 5) the mask is visibly clean.

Do Not Reuse N95/KN95/KF94 respirators when 1) There is an expectation that it is contaminated with blood, bodily fluids or respiratory secretions, or, 2) following close contact with any patient with an infectious disease.

Maintenance: N95/KN95/KF94 respirators should never be shared, and should not be cleaned or washed. Discard the respirator if evidently soiled.

Storage: Until they are needed for use, respirators should be stored in their original packaging, in a structured storage space where they can't be crushed or distorted. Between multiple uses, respirators should be stored similarly to new respirators, individually in clean, well-ventilated containers or bags (i.e., paper bags).