Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Mask Use for Non-Healthcare Workers

> **Masks (either surgical masks or non-medical masks such as cloth masks, bandanas or other face coverings), can be worn to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to others (also known as source control). Source control masks could be considered if physical distancing is not possible. Employers can assess worker risk of exposure to COVID-19 when considering source control in the workplace.**

Masks used for source control – principles

- **Masks worn for source control protect others** from potential infectious droplets of the wearer.
- **Non-medical masks, e.g. cloth masks, are preferred for source control** due to current shortages in medical masks.
- Masking may lead to more hand-face contact. Washing hands or cleaning with alcohol based hand rub is critical – perform frequently and immediately after touching the mask.
- Some workers may not wish to wear a mask or have conditions (e.g. asthma, eczema) that make masking difficult or uncomfortable. Be flexible in a workplace policy on masks for source control.
- If personal protective equipment is required to perform a work task, that requirement takes priority over masking for source control.

Assessing worker risk of exposure to COVID-19

- A risk assessment can help the employer determine whether source control could be helpful for workers. The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration risk categorization is adapted below.
- Risk among workers will vary by ability to physically distance and other controls available, e.g. physical barriers
- Non-healthcare workers generally fall into low (minimal contact with the public and coworkers) to medium (frequent/close contact with the public and coworkers) exposure risk. Here are some examples of work that vary from low to medium risk:
  - Staff working from home
  - Office workers able to physically distance
  - Delivery/courier, pick-up/drop-off service
  - Food service workers, office workers unable to physically distance, transit workers
  - Grocery store clerks, child care workers
- Where workers are not able to practice physical distancing or have frequent contact with the public, masking could be considered for source control.

Applying the hierarchy of controls

A comprehensive strategy to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace would include as many controls as possible:

- **Engineering:** Remove/block the hazard at the source (e.g. physical distancing, physical barriers such as Plexiglass booths, frequent environmental cleaning/disinfection).
- **Administrative:** Optimizing the movement of workers to minimize potential contact with the hazard (e.g. scheduling – staggered shifts, breaks, and meals; work station spacing; work from home policies, limited hours, staff reduction, virtual meetings, paid sick leave, temperature screening, symptom screening/reporting).
    - **Personal Hygiene:** Worker actions or behaviors to reduce hazard exposure (e.g. clean hands, coughing or sneezing into the sleeve, masking for source control).
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** e.g. masks, gloves, eye protection, gowns or coveralls.

Masking for source control could be considered a personal hygiene measure, and it protects **others**, not the masked worker. If implementing masking for source control, note the following:

- Masks are to be changed if visibly soiled, damp, damaged or difficult to breathe through.
- For non-medical masks, no specific type or material is clearly better than another.
- Breathability, comfort, and safety (e.g. adequate vision, communication) are key to compliance.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada and the US Centers for Disease Control have provided guidance on how to make, use, and care for cloth masks and could be used as a guide.
- Refer to When and How to Wear a Mask and the Ministry of Health for more information.

When using masks for source control, always remember

- **Masking for source control protects others around you by catching your own droplets.** Ensure the mask covers both the nose and mouth.
- Where physical distancing is not possible, worker risk of COVID-19 exposure can help determine if a source control masking policy could be useful.
- When wearing masks, it is critical to avoid touching the face, and to wash hands or use alcohol based hand rub often.
- Masking for source control needs to be part of a broad strategy to reduce transmission risk.
- Medical masks are to be conserved for use in healthcare workers.

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