SAMUEL MERRITT UNIVERSITY
COVID-19 PROTOCOL:
PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

PPE FOR THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

SMU's COVID-19 policies and practices related to PPE follow the most current CDC and California Department of Public Health (CDPH) guidelines. They are vetted for the University's specific teaching settings by the SMU COVID-19 Committees and our infectious disease and public health expert[1], who is familiar with the SMU campus environments and the types of learning activities allowed during pandemic restrictions.

Until further notice, the Personal Protective Equipment guidelines for all individuals (students, faculty, staff, visitors[2]) are as follows:

MASKS

Review the CDPH Guidance for the Use of Masks.

1. **Masks are required for all individuals on all SMU campus facilities when indoor and in the presence of others, regardless of vaccination status.**

2. Required level of mask protection while on campus and in the presence of others (see Figure 1):

    a. When you are in any indoor campus area you are required to use a mask that falls in the "Better" or "Best" level of protection.
    b. While engaging in on-campus learning activities designated by the Health, Safety & Operations Committee (e.g., lab/simulation sessions), you will be required to wear an appropriately-fitting[3], NIOSH-approved N95. Exceptions are allowable, in which case you are required to wear a NIOSH-approved KF94/KN95 respirator or a well-fitting combination of a new surgical mask underneath a clean cloth mask.

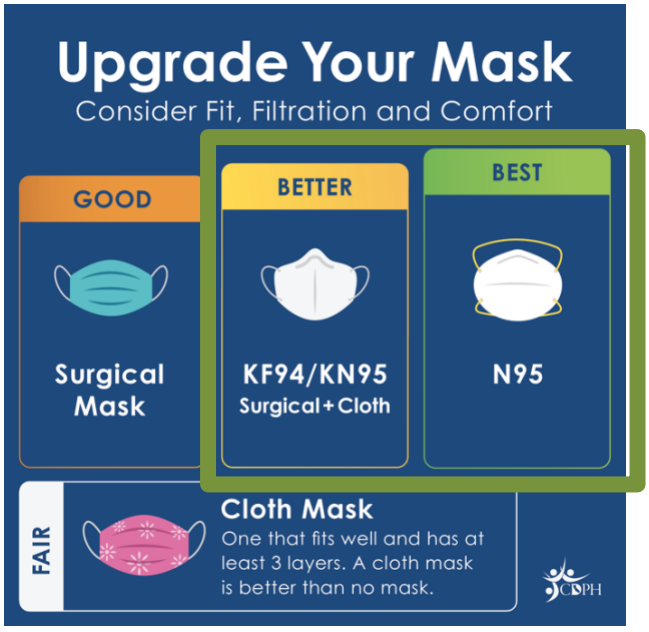

Figure 1: Retrieved 01/18/22 from: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Get-the-Most-out-of-Masking.aspx

[1] John Swartzberg, M.D., Clinical Professor Emeritus (Infectious Diseases and Vaccinology) at UC Berkeley's School of Public Health; Chair, Editorial Board, School of Public Health's Health & Wellness Publications; Regent, SMU Board of Regents.

[2] Visitors include, but are not limited to, individuals engaged in teaching or operational activities at the invitation of a SMU employee; potential students or employees; or guests of the University. This does not include vendors/contractors, who operate under separate PPE protocols.

[3] Appropriately fitting does not necessarily mean that each person must be fit-tested for the N95 respirator worn on campus. It does mean that when you wear a mask/respirator it should fully cover your nose and mouth and gaps should not be evident between your face and the mask; the mask straps should be in good repair and should be elastic enough to prevent gaps as previously mentioned.

3. Provision of masks and respirators:
    a. Disposable surgical masks are available at all campus entry locations – when a clean surgical mask is worn beneath a clean, well-fitted cloth mask, this provides a "Better-" level of protection.
    b. NIOSH-approved KN95 respirators will be available for all employees and students for use when on campus. In general, those supplies will be at campus entry points or other designated campus locations, or there will be specific arrangements made with department administrators as needed.
    c. NIOSH-approved N95 respirators will be provided for students, faculty, and staff when they are required for lab/simulation activities.[4]
    d. Employees and students may wear N95 or KF94/KN95 respirators that they have purchased if the product purchased is on the list of NIOSH approved equipment.[5]

4. Reuse of N95/KN95 respirators
    a. N95 and KN95 respirators may be used multiple times. For the purpose of maintaining an adequate SMU supply of respirators and minimizing the environmental cost of using disposable equipment, plan to reuse N95 or KF94/KN95 respirators according to current recommendations (see Appendix A). Request a replacement mask if your current one is soiled, or no longer fits appropriately. See the memorandum on this topic.

EYE PROTECTION

1. Eye protection, in the form of a face shield, goggles, or safety glasses is required during in-person learning activities (lab/simulation/other) and recommended when you are indoor and may be less than 6 feet distanced from others for more than 15 minutes within a 24-hour period. Eye protection is worn in combination with a mask or respirator.
2. A face shield that covers to the chin is the preferred eye protection equipment as, in concert with a properly worn mask, it will also provide a second barrier to the spread of aerosolized particles or droplets from your nose or mouth.
3. Provision of eye protection:
    a. SMU provides face shields or goggles for all students and faculty, and face shields for staff and visitors wishing to wear one while on campus and in the presence of others. This equipment is distributed according to a process established by your academic program or department. For students, the course faculty will have this information. For faculty and staff, your supervisor/manager will have this information.
    b. Eye protection devices can be safely reused if cleaned properly.
    c. Goggles or safety glasses are acceptable forms of eye protection. For consultation regarding what constitutes appropriate equipment in this category, contact the COVID-19 Health, Safety, & Operations Committee.[6]

PPE FOR THE CLINICAL ENVIRONMENT

Students and faculty must comply with the PPE requirements established by each clinical agency.

1. Students and faculty must be provided with the types and quality of PPE equipment currently recommended for the clinical setting and with the same frequency as healthcare professionals at the specific agency. In general, this PPE provision requirement is stated in the SMU/clinical agency contract.
2. Revised requirements for PPE are not uncommon during this pandemic period. Lead Program Administrators must be on the alert for notifications of any PPE mandate changes at each site, particularly noting if the agency will be supplying the newly required PPE.
3. If a clinical agency is not providing students with proper PPE, as expected, this should be reported to program administrators, who will follow up using proper communication channels.
4. On the occasions where the clinical agency is unable to provide required PPE for students and the academic program is unable to meet the needs of students and faculty', program administrators should bring this to the attention of SMU's COVID-19 Health, Safety & Operations (HS&O) Committee. The HS&O Committee will facilitate decisions required – as each situation dictates - related to the PPE supplies for students.

[4] The University's N95 inventory may not encompass all possible respirator sizes, and students should be mindful that these respirators will not be fit-tested for their face. If there are no gaps between one's face and the device, this would be considered Best-level protection. If students have their own N95, or KN95 respirator, they will be afforded Better- or Best- level protection if the devices are considered NIOSH-approved and if the device is not soiled or damaged.

[5] NIOSH-approved N95 Particulate Filtering Facepiece Respirators (FFRs); NIOSH-approved alternatives to N95 FFRs (i.e., KN95) (Appendix A, Table 1 in the CDPH Guidance for Enforcing OSHA's Respiratory Protection Standard)

[6] Committee co-chairs, Celeste Villanueva (cvillanueva@samuelmerritt.edu) or Trevor Flanary (tflanery@samuelmerritt.edu)

Appendix A

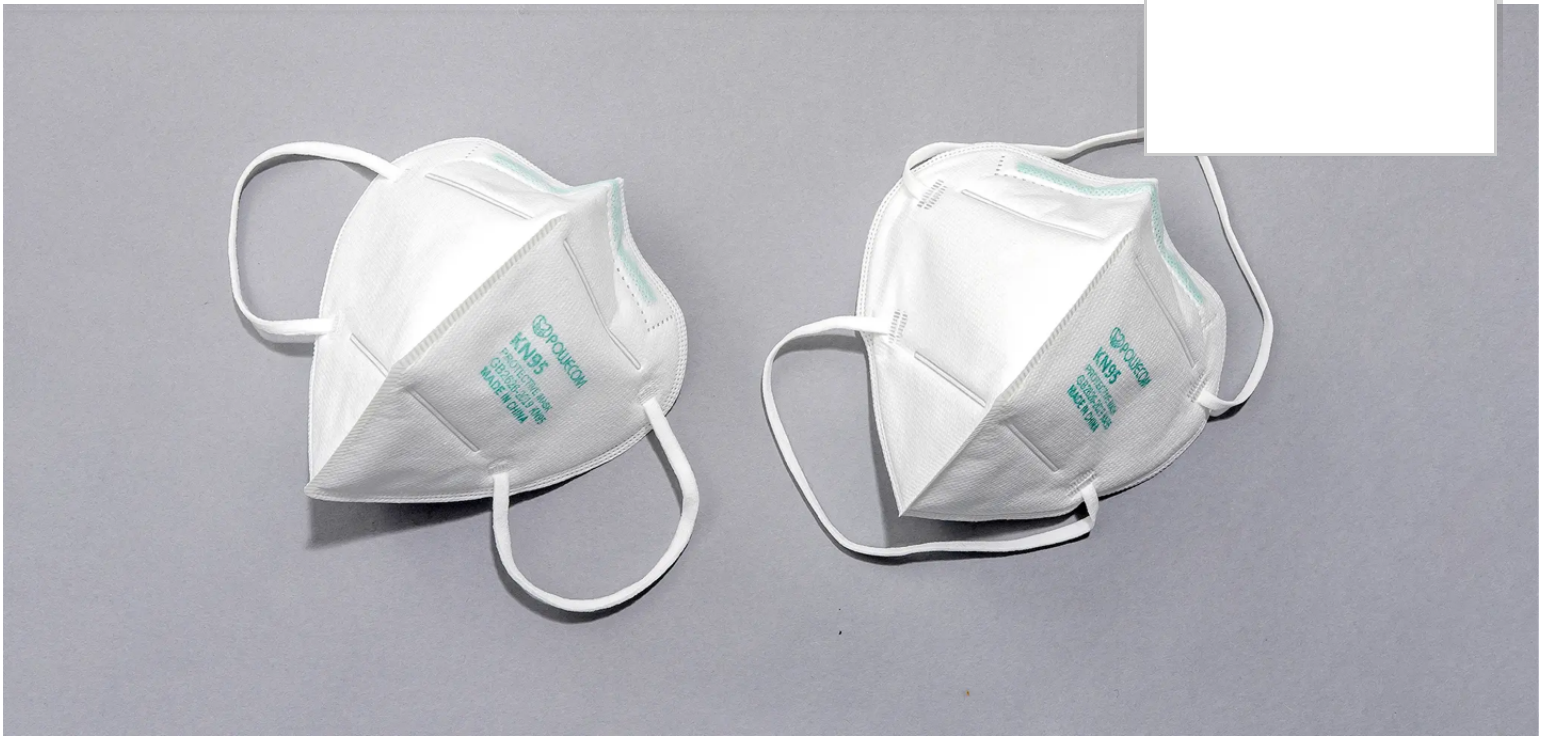

Photo: Sarah Kobos

How to Reuse N95, KN95, and Other Disposable Masks

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Joanne Chen

Save

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently updated its mask recommendations to align with what experts and many other people have long known: N95s and other respirator masks (when they are legitimate and fit properly) are more protective than most cloth face masks are. But these disposable respirator masks cost $1 to $3 apiece, and throwing them out as quickly as you would paper cups can add up, especially if you're masking your entire family. You might also be concerned about the environmental cost of disposable masks, which are constructed from nonrecyclable materials. Fortunately, for most people and in most situations, you don't need to chuck your mask after each use, or each day. Here are some answers to common questions about reusing your disposable mask.

How can I safely reuse a mask?

You can re-wear a mask after you have stored it in a paper bag for a few days, according to the CDC and multiple experts we've interviewed for our respirator guide. The agency provides a simple strategy for healthcare workers that involves rotating used masks in brown paper bags, a

variation of which was employed during the N95 shortage in the early days of the pandemic. The coronavirus has an expected survival time of about 72 hours, so waiting for, say, five to seven days should be enough time for it to be inactivated.

Personally, to keep track, I have five masks on rotation and seven brown paper bags marked with the days of week, lined up on my windowsill. I place my mask in the appropriately labeled bag between uses during the day and at the end of it. After a week has passed, I either take the mask out to wear or move it to an eighth bag marked “Ready to Use.”

Is it really safe to reuse masks right now, considering how infectious Omicron is?

Yes, reusing a mask is safe. Masks work the same way on any variant—by trapping virus-containing particles in their layers. Also, the coronavirus is transmitted mainly through respiration; you’re less likely to catch it by touching an infected surface. That said, it’s safest, and just good hygiene, to handle your masks with care, touching only the elastics and washing your hands afterward.

What if my mask gets wet?

Moisture, even from your breath, degrades the mask little by little, and that process will probably hasten if you're wearing the mask to work out at the gym or if you're in a humid room or climate. If your mask is wet due to condensation from breathing, you can reuse it. Keeping those paper bags in a dry spot (ideally by a sunny window) can help enhance the viral-deactivation process, said Christopher Sulmonte, project administrator at the Johns Hopkins Biocontainment Unit, a facility for patients with emerging infectious diseases. If your mask gets drenched (say, you get caught in the rain), throw it away.

Can I wash my mask or disinfect it with bleach or alcohol?

Though you may be tempted to rinse or wash your used disposable mask, even just to freshen it up, don't try it. Getting the mask wet or agitating the mask with soap can damage the material.

You also shouldn't attempt to disinfect your used mask with alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or other chemicals. A 2020 Emerging Infectious Diseases research letter reported that treating a disposable face mask with alcohol reduced the mask's

integrity and therefore its filtration efficiency. Hydrogen peroxide worked better, but the researchers applied it using a specialized machine, something you wouldn't find outside a lab or hospital setting. Bleach or other disinfectants are a bad idea, too: Not only would they damage the mask, but "you don't want to risk breathing in any disinfectant that remains on the respirator," said Nikki Vars McCullough, a vice president at 3M's Personal Safety Division.

What about treating the mask with heat or UV light?

That same paper published in 2020, amid the N95 shortage, found that dry-heat decontamination can be effective only one or two times, and UV for three times, before the mask's fit and filtration may be compromised. Although these methods may be important in medical settings highly exposed to COVID-19 during a respirator shortage and in need of techniques to immediately zap away viruses, they require a strict protocol that's impossible to follow for most people outside of a healthcare setting. You're better off using the paper-bag method. "It's a lot easier, less expensive, and there's less of a chance that you'll be hurting the mask," said Sulmonte.

When is it time to throw out the mask?

“There’s no hard and fast rule,” said Sulmonte. The CDC paper-bag directive suggests discarding a disposable N95 mask after five uses. But that guideline was meant for workers in a healthcare setting. For everybody else, that may not be necessary. A mask is still wearable if its elastic bands continue to create a secure fit and the material looks clean and provides good airflow. (Dust, pollen, air pollutants, makeup, skin oils, and, yes, inactivated virus eventually accumulate and clog up the filter.)

Also think about where you’ve worn the mask and for how long. Someone who wears a mask in the subway every day, for example, may need to throw it out sooner than someone who wears theirs to the grocery store every once in a while. Whatever the circumstances, switch to a fresh mask if yours is dirty, thinning, damaged, or hard to breathe through, or if it no longer maintains a good seal.

Is there any situation where I should throw it out after one use?

Yes! Assuming replacements are readily

available, Sulmonte advises throwing a mask away if you've been in a place where high virus exposure is expected—for instance, if you've been interacting with a COVID-19–positive person.

Further reading

Where to Buy N95s, KN95s, and Surgical-Style Masks in 2022

We've been researching medical-style masks and respirators for months. Here's what we're buying.

At-Home COVID-19 Antigen Test Kits: Where to Buy and What You Should Know

At-home test kits offer a quick and easy way to screen for COVID-19. Here's where to find them, and what to know about antigen tests and Omicron.