

# Wearing a mask at work

## Nurse Lee's Health FAQ #2

Under the current Santa Clara County shelter-in-place protocol (under the July 2 order), all businesses that are open / under operation are mandatory to have a Social Distancing Protocol in place, and to have a "COVID-19 PREPARED" sign, as well as the Social Distancing Protocol Visitor Information Sheet posted at or near the entrance of the facility that is the subject of the Protocol. Under that Social Distancing Protocol that your employer or supervisor had to fill out, there are certain criterias that have to be met:

- Confirms that the business is putting measures in place to protect its workers and the public
- Confirms that the business is properly training its workers
- Confirms that the business is posting proper signage
- Confirms that the business has an adequate plan in place if a worker tests positive for COVID-19

In my last health FAQ, I had covered the importance of filling out a daily health screening each work day. This month's FAQ covers another important measure that SUSD has implemented to protect its workers and the public, and also as required by law, and it is **the requirement of wearing a mask / face covering while at work.**

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## FAQs on face covering requirements

1. What is the health officer's requirement in face covering in Santa Clara County?
  - According to the order issued July 2, you are required to wear a face covering:
    - Whenever you are at, or in line to enter, any public indoor space, including a business.
    - Whenever you are waiting for or riding on public transit.
    - Most times when you are engaged in work, including:
      - When inside a room or enclosed area where others are present who are not members of your household;
      - Interacting with any member of the public;
      - Working in a space visited by the public, even when a member of the public is not present;
      - Working in a space where food is packaged or prepared for sale;
      - When inside or passing through common areas like hallways, stairways, and elevators.
    - Whenever driving a taxi, carshare, rideshare, or paratransit vehicle when someone outside your household is present.
    - Whenever you are outdoors in public spaces and cannot maintain a 6-foot social distance from people outside your household.
2. What are businesses required to do? In other words, what is my employer required to do?
  - Businesses must post signs stating that a face covering is required when you are at their facilities. They must also require their employees to wear face coverings while working.
3. Who does NOT have to wear a face covering then?
  - The following people do not have to wear a face covering:
    - Children under age two.
    - People who a healthcare professional has advised should not wear a face covering because they have a medical condition that would make wearing a face covering dangerous.
    - People who cannot put on or take off a face covering without assistance.

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- People who are hearing impaired who need to remove their face covering to effectively communicate (or people who are communicating with someone who is hearing impaired).
  - Workers who must remove their face covering to comply with local, state, or federal rules.
  - People who must take off their face covering to address a basic biological need, like eating or drinking.
  - People who are actively engaged in outdoor exercise and maintaining at least 6 feet social distancing from others not in their household.
4. What about face coverings for students? Are they required to wear them too?
- According to Santa Clara County's school reopening plan (dated 9/21/20):
    - **All students** (transitional kindergarten through 12th grade) are required to wear face coverings:
      - while arriving and departing from school campus;
      - in any area outside of the classroom (except when eating, drinking, or engaging in a physical activity requiring heaving exertion);
      - while waiting for or riding on a school bus.
    - **Students in 2nd grade and below** must be encouraged to wear a face covering within their stable classroom cohort as much as possible.
    - **Students in 3rd grade and above** must use face coverings when in the classroom even if they are in a stable classroom cohort.
5. What if a student cannot tolerate wearing a face covering?
- Students who are excluded from the face covering requirements include:
    - anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the covering without assistance
    - students with special needs who are unable to tolerate a face covering.
6. If I'm alone in my cubicle or sitting far apart from other people in an open workspace, do I have to wear a face covering?
- As a general rule, everyone must wear a face covering at all times when at a business facility unless they are alone in a fully enclosed room with a door that is not visited by people outside their household, such as a

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private office. Because cubicles and other open workspaces are not fully enclosed, you must wear a face covering while working in these spaces.

7. What about when I'm using a conference room by myself? Do I still have to wear a face covering?
  - You must also wear a face covering when using a conference room, even if you are alone in the room while you use it, if it is also used by anyone who is not a member of your household. This will help protect anyone who uses the conference room after you're finished.
8. What about if I'm headed to the break room to warm up my lunch really quick?
  - Face coverings are also required when in or passing through common spaces, like restrooms, hallways, and stairwells.
9. When I eat my lunch, I have to take my face covering off. Is that safe?
  - You may remove your face covering to eat and drink at work, but you must put it back on as soon as you are finished eating or drinking. Congregating with coworkers to eat indoors is unsafe and strongly discouraged. When possible, workers are strongly encouraged to take their meals during the workday outdoors, or if not, to eat privately at their own workspace.
10. I noticed that the break rooms are closed and I cannot eat my lunch there. Why?
  - According to the county's school reopening guide (revised 9/21/20), it is a requirement that "staff are not allowed to eat or gather in any indoor spaces, such as break rooms and offices", and there is a capacity limit of 1 staff member allowed per 250 sq ft of indoor space. So staff are encouraged to eat meals outdoors or in large, well ventilated spaces.
11. If I'm alone in my private office, do I have to wear a face covering?
  - No, but you are strongly encouraged to do so. If you are alone in a fully enclosed room (meaning that the walls go all the way up to the ceiling and your door is closed), and the room is not visited by people outside your household, you do not have to wear a face covering. Even so, it is safest to *always* wear a face covering at work, even in private offices, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission from respiratory droplets and aerosols

that may linger and spread to other people who enter the room or work nearby.

12. Santa Clara County has moved from the red tier to the orange tier in the “Blueprint for a Safer Economy” on 10/13/20, which means more businesses are allowed to reopen on 10/14/20. Why do we still have to wear our masks so strictly?
- Even though our county has moved to the orange tier, keep in mind that activities allowed under the new order are not necessarily safe. Certain activities, such as dining indoors and gathering, are still high risk. We’ve all worked really hard together to move our county up a tier, and we need to remain diligent to keep our community safe, that means continuing to wear a mask, limit our contact with others, keep our distance from anyone outside our household, and get tested.
13. Can you offer any tips in choosing the right face covering? I feel like I can’t breathe with my mask on all day at work.
- Choose a face covering with materials that are breathable, such as a washable fabric that has two or more layers. Avoid fabric that makes it hard to breathe, such as vinyl. Face coverings also come in many different styles and designs, while a pleated mask may not work for you, a 3-D mask may work better. Also, if you wear glasses, find a mask that fits closely over your nose that has a nose wire to limit fogging. And lastly, if you need to take a break from your masks, step outdoor and take a short break with your mask off (while staying socially distanced from others) and put it back on when you’re done.

## DO choose masks that



**Have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric**



**Completely cover your nose and mouth**



**Fit snugly against the sides of your face and don't have gaps**

## How NOT to wear a mask



Around your neck



On your forehead



Under your nose



Only on your nose



On your chin



Dangling from one ear



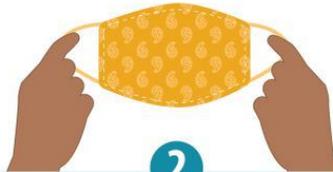
On your arm

## How to take off a mask



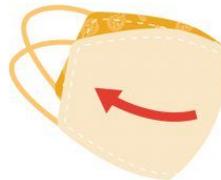
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Carefully, untie the strings behind your head or stretch the ear loops



2

Handle only by the ear loops or ties



3

Fold outside corners together



4

Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing and wash hands immediately after removing

