

Appendix B: Use of Protective Masks for Staff & Clients



Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) is committed to providing timely guidance to support response efforts to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

The following guideline for THA staff was developed in response to recent information from Tacoma Pierce County Health Department and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) about wearing cloth and other protective face coverings.

Both agencies emphasize that wearing non-medical face masks is not protection against getting or spreading the virus but is an additional measure that may help. Wearing cloth face coverings will not prevent the spread of COVID-19 without other protective measures. For that reason, it is critical to emphasize that masks are an extra layer of protection but not a substitute for social distancing measures.

Staff

Effective immediately and until further notice, all Tacoma Housing Authority staff must wear a face mask in the following circumstances:

- Shared office spaces and meeting rooms where employees are within 6 feet of another person
- Representing THA in public spaces (including posting notices on residents doors)
- Moving throughout offices and properties
- Meeting with anyone in person, either at the offices, lobbies, common spaces, or in their units

All employees in Washington state are required to wear face coverings per the governor's [Safe Start Washington](#) plan. Employers are required to provide cloth facial coverings to staff, unless exposure dictates a higher level of protection under the Department of Labor and Industries' safety and health rules and guidance. Staff may request a mask by emailing the Facilities Manager directly. Staff may choose to wear their own facial coverings at work, provided it meets the minimum requirements. Please check the [Centers for Disease Control](#) website for guidance about making cloth masks.

Staff are not required to wear a face mask when working alone in their office, cubicle or vehicle, as long as there is at least six feet or a barrier between them and people passing by.

If a staff member is unable to wear a mask due to health conditions, the employee should consult with Human Resources and their supervisor to establish alternative arrangements, which may include having their workspace relocated to an area that provides adequate distance between them and other employees. **Employees should submit a Reasonable Accommodations request if unable to wear a face covering. A Face Shield does not substitute for a Face Mask.**

Clients

- When visiting our offices, clients will be required to wear cloth face coverings. Clients will be notified of this when scheduling an appointment. We will also post signage around our buildings. Masks may be provided by staff upon request and availability.
- When meeting with staff, clients will be required to wear cloth face coverings. Clients will be notified of this when scheduling an appointment.
- If client/guest will not wear a face covering, the appointment will be rescheduled for a virtual or phone meeting.
- Only one person from the household should be present for an appointment.
- An appointment may be held at the client's unit, but to increase the size of the space and allow for 6 feet distance, we highly recommend meeting in community rooms or outside.

Guests

- When visiting our offices, guests will be required to wear cloth face coverings. We will also post signage around our buildings. Masks may be provided by staff upon request and availability.
- When meeting with staff, guests will be required to wear cloth face coverings.
- An appointment may be held in person provided 6 feet social distancing can be maintained.

Face Mask Types & Guidance

What is a facemask? A mask covers the mouth and nose to offer limited respiratory protection for the user by trapping large particles or bodily fluids that may contain bacteria or viruses.

What is a face shield? The face shield covers the face, eyes, mouth, and nose of the wearer and offers limited screening from the bodily fluids and respiratory droplets transmitted by other persons. The shield does not offer protection from airborne particulates. It can be used in conjunction with a facemask and preserves the usability of facemask. The shield can be sanitized and reused.

Types of Face Masks

Low Profile Disposable Mask: Paper cup that fits over nose and mouth. Because it does not seal to the face, these do not substitute for N95 masks.



Face Shield: A clear protective shield that covers the mouth, nose, eyes, and face. In this picture, the wearer is wearing the shield and a face mask. Shields will be available early to mid-May.



Disposable Mask: Woven fiber that fits over nose and mouth.



How do I wear a face mask? The following are general guidelines, only. Staff are responsible to seek out manufacturer instructions and online training to ensure that they are correctly wearing masks. This is particularly important for those who wear glasses and facial hair.

1. Wear Face Covering Correctly

- Wash your hands before putting on your face covering
- Put it over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin
- Try to fit it snugly against the sides of your face
- Make sure you can breathe easily

2. Use the Face Covering to Protect Others

- Wear a face covering to help protect others in case you're infected but don't have symptoms
- Keep the covering on your face the entire time you're in public
- Don't put the covering around your neck or up to your forehead
- Don't touch the face covering, and, if you do, wash your hands

3. Removing Your Cloth Face Covering Carefully

- Untie the strings behind your head or stretch the ear loops
- Handle only by the ear loops or ties
- Fold outside corners together
- Place covering in the washing machine
- Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing the face mask and wash hands immediately after

4. Follow Everyday Health Habits

- Stay at least 6 feet away from others
- Avoid contact with people who are sick
- Wash your hands often, with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds each time
- Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- Use gloves provided outside restrooms to access the restroom and flip the (in-use/available) sign

Hazards of Face Masks

Voluntary face masks, particularly when homemade, may create safety hazards that Tacoma Housing Authority must address. The list below includes potential hazards and how THA will respond to mitigate these risks:

1. **Obstructed vision:** some face masks may steam up safety glasses/goggles and impact the employee's ability to perform safety-sensitive tasks.

THA will train employees on the risks of improperly fitting face mask and condensation on glasses.

2. **Caught-in/entanglement hazards:** face masks or bandanas could be caught in machinery and seriously injure employees.

Employees need to consult with a safety committee to see if face mask or bandanas should be permissible in the worksite.

3. **Disease vector/respiratory hazards:** face masks may accumulate COVID-19 viruses and other pathogens if they become wet with saliva or sweat.

THA will train employees on how to properly remove face masks.

4. **Asphyxiation hazards:** tight, homemade face masks made of impermeable materials or face masks covered with saliva or mucous may excessively limit employee's breathing and cause rebreathing of carbon dioxide or other infectious material. A restriction of breathing of fresh air can create an asphyxiation hazard.

Training will include how to properly use masks including proper fitting and replacement of masks. Resources will be provided for how to properly construct homemade masks.

5. **False sense of security:** employees may presume that they cannot spread or contract coronavirus on account of a face mask.

Training will address that the better method to prevent transmission is social distancing and that face masks serve as supplemental solution.