

This additional guidance describes the forms of respiratory protection and face coverings to use in Auburn University Laboratories.

Face Coverings

Lab personnel should not wear a cloth face covering when manipulating hazardous materials (chemical, biological and radiological substances). Disposable face coverings, such as surgical masks, are recommended when handling such materials for easy disposal if contaminated or at the end of the day.

A face covering is not intended to protect the wearer, but by covering their mouth and nose with a face covering, they are less likely to transmit the virus to others if they are asymptomatic or have unrecognized, early COVID-19 symptoms. See Risk Management and Safety's separate fact sheet for more details about the [use and care of face coverings](#).

Surgical Masks

Lab personnel that work with hazardous chemicals or biological materials should wear a surgical mask in lieu of a cloth face covering. A surgical mask is only effective if used properly:

- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer before putting on and removing the mask or face covering.
- Your mouth and nose should be fully covered.
- The mask should cover both your nose and mouth, to impede virus-containing respiratory droplets that can enter and be expelled from both the nose and mouth.
- Do not touch the outside of your mask. Breathing through the mask draws respiratory droplets towards your mask, so treat the external part of your mask as if it were contaminated.
- If you have difficulty breathing when wearing a face covering, it should be removed.
- **Lab surgical masks should be disposed of at the end of the day, or if damaged or contaminated. When removing your mask, only touch the loops that go around your ear.**

A face covering or a surgical mask is not a substitute for physical distancing. As the CDC stresses, wearing a face mask or covering is an additional public health measure people should take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. You should still stay at least 6 feet away from other people (physical distancing) and frequently wash your hands.



Additional points about wearing surgical masks:¹

- If you are unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition or religious preference you should follow the instructions below:
 - **Students** who are asking for an accommodation to a policy (including wearing a face covering) due to a disability should contact the Office of Accessibility. Student requests for exemptions based on a religious concern should contact Auburn Cares.
 - **Employees** requesting for accommodations based on a disability should complete the Employee Disability Accommodation Request Form and Disability Documentation Form. Employees requesting a religious accommodation should complete the Religious Accommodation Request Form. Completed accommodation request forms should be submitted to the Office of Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity.
- You should wear a surgical mask when working alone in a small room that is shared by several people, such as a scheduled microscope or instrument room.
- A surgical mask may be used as a face covering outside of the lab, but do not wear the same mask both inside and outside of the lab. As you do with other lab PPE—such as a lab coat and gloves— the surgical mask you wear in the lab should be removed when leaving the lab.
- Labs that use pyrophoric chemicals should use a FR-rated face masks.
- Wearing a mask can lead to problems with fogging of your eyewear, use an antifog spray to prevent this.

In some cases, additional means of respiratory protection is required based on the labs specific hazards, such as an N95 respirator, or a powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR).

KN95 Masks

KN95 masks are made to standards established by China and other Asian countries. Most do not fit tightly, so they cannot be used as a respiratory protection. They are water resistant and provide good filtration, some may be used as a face covering.

N95 Respirators

An N95 respirator is a tight-fitting respirator that is designed to protect the wearer from aerosols or fine particles. Although primarily used by frontline medical personnel, RMS may specify their use with research animals or for other research procedures.

If an N95 respirator is required RMS may inspect the lab and assess the exposure risks. Although an N95 respirator may be appropriate, RMS might alternatively determine that sufficient protection can be provided via more room air changes, different work practices, or some other safety measure. With respect to work with research animals, RMS occasionally recommends the use an N95 respirator or a PAPR for certain tasks, but an N95 respirator is not necessary for most work with research animals.

¹ Note that some surgical masks are certified to meet ASTM standards. ASTM standards are referenced by the FDA specifying performance requirements for medical face masks. Basic criteria in specifying these standards include high levels of bacterial, particulate, and fluid resistance. Healthcare workers require surgical masks with ASTM ratings. EHS may specify their use in clinics, with research animals, or for other research procedures. Surgical masks lacking the ASTM rating must also demonstrate fluid resistance and particulate filtration efficiency, and often visually appear similar to surgical medical masks.



Individuals who use an N95 respirator must be medically cleared, trained, and fit tested to the proper type and size. It is important for the wearer to understand that, to be effective, an N95 respirator must be tight-fitting and—at all times during its use—must fit snugly against the sides of the face so there are no gaps. During use, unfiltered air cannot be allowed to pass between the respirator and the wearer’s skin. If this occurs, the purpose of the respirator is defeated. Many models and sizes of N95 respirators are made, and—because everyone’s face is shaped differently—it is likely that only a few types can fit tightly on any person’s face. Fit testing involves trying on different models and sizes of N95s on each person, and testing their effectiveness to select the type with the best fit. Therefore, fit testing is vitally important prior to using an N95 respirator.

When worn for extended periods many people find wearing an N95 respirator to be uncomfortable. N95 respirators are in short supply and should be reserved for healthcare workers. Because of this:

- While N95 respirators are designed to be single use-disposable, RMS has created a fact sheet about the [reuse of an N95](#) during the pandemic shortage.

Face Shields

Face shields are used when splash hazards are present and do not replace the use of a face covering.

