



COVID-19 Hot Topics | Face Coverings

As of 6 April 20

Face Coverings

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Military personnel, DoD civilian employees, their family members, and DoD contractors are strongly encouraged to follow CDC guidelines on the use of cloth face coverings in public settings or where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.”

Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper (Memorandum, April 5)

Data:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies), especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.
- On April 5, Secretary of Defense issued guidance for the wear of cloth face coverings for all individuals on DoD installations when they cannot maintain six feet of social distancing.
- The guidance includes all military personnel, DoD civilian employees, family members, DoD contractors and all other individuals on DoD property, installations, and facilities.
- To the extent practical, all individuals on DoD property, installations, and facilities will wear cloth face coverings when they cannot maintain six feet of social distance in public areas or work centers; the guidance does not include personal residences on a military installation.
- The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness will issue updated force health protection guidance on DoD implementation; the Army will issue guidance on wear for Soldiers.
- Exceptions to this requirement may be approved by local commanders or supervisors, and then submitted up the chain of command for situational awareness.
- Security checkpoints may require the lowering of face covers to verify identification.

Army statement (April 6)

“To mitigate the spread of COVID-19, the U.S. Army is implementing Department of Defense guidance on the use of cloth face coverings. Soldiers, family members, Army civilian employees and contractors should follow Centers for Disease Control guidelines on the use of cloth face coverings in public settings or where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.

“Soldiers are authorized to wear the neck gaiter and other cloth items, such as bandanas and scarves, as face coverings. Soldiers should not, however, fashion face coverings from Army Combat Uniforms or other materials that have been chemically-treated. Personal protective equipment, such as N95 respirators or surgical masks, must be reserved for use in medical settings.

“Force health protection is the Army's top priority. Army senior leaders are urging everyone to adhere to the latest CDC guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus, including practicing rigorous protocols for personal hygiene, staying home when sick and implementing social distancing techniques.”



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Talking Points

- Force health protection is the Army's top priority. Protecting the force includes mitigating the spread of the virus and ensuring personnel have the most up-to-date information on appropriate measures to prevent further spread of COVID-19.
- Soldiers, family members, Army civilian employees and Army contractors are strongly encouraged to follow CDC guidelines on the use of cloth face coverings in public settings or where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.
- Soldiers are authorized to wear the neck gaiter and other cloth items, such as bandanas and scarves, as face coverings.
- Soldiers should not use materials from Army Combat Uniforms, or other fabrics that have been chemically-treated, to fashion face coverings.
- Medical personal protective equipment such as N95 respirators or surgical masks will not be issued for this purpose as these will be reserved for the appropriate personnel.
- Army senior leaders are urging everyone to adhere to the latest guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control to prevent the spread of the virus, including practicing rigorous protocols for personal hygiene, staying home when sick and implementing social distancing techniques.
- Army Staff is continually evaluating current day-to-day operations and monitoring the force to ensure we are doing everything we can to mitigate the threat.

Q&A

Q: Who is covered by the new DoD guidance on face coverings?

A: The guidance strongly encourages all military personnel, DoD civilian employees, family members, contractors and all other individuals on DoD property, installations, and facilities to follow CDC guidelines on the use of cloth face coverings in public settings or where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.

Q: Are there any exceptions to the guidance?

A: Personal residences of Soldiers' and family members' on military installation are not covered by the guidance. Other exceptions to the requirement may be approved by local commanders or supervisors, and then submitted up the chain of command for situational awareness. Security checkpoints may require the lowering of face covers to verify identification.

The CDC recommends that cloth face coverings should not be placed on children younger than 2 years of age and anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.

Q: What sort of face coverings should Soldiers wear?

A: Soldiers are authorized to wear the neck gaiter and other cloth items, such as bandanas and scarves, as face coverings. To protect the facial area, the cloth item must cover the mouth and nose and extend to the chin or below as well as to the sides of the face. It must be secured or fastened to the face in a manner that allows the Soldier to breathe while also preventing disease exposure or contamination.



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Soldiers and Army personnel should not wear masks that have printed wording, profanity, or logos, script or imagery that are racist, demeaning or derogatory. Leaders must use their best judgment when it comes to color, fit and design of face masks and approach this as a force protection issue.

Q: Can Soldiers make homemade face coverings out of old uniforms?

A: Soldiers must not cut up Army Combat Uniforms, or use other fabrics that have been chemically-treated, to fashion face coverings.

Q: Why is the CDC now recommending face coverings?

A: In light of new data about how COVID-19 spreads, along with evidence of widespread COVID-19 illness in communities across the country, CDC recommends that people wear a cloth face covering to cover their nose and mouth in the community setting. Individuals are encouraged to fashion face coverings from household items such as t-shirts or clean cloth that can cover the nose and mouth area. These face coverings are not a substitute for social distancing. Cloth face coverings are especially important to wear in public in areas of widespread COVID-19 illness.

Q: Does the face covering replace the social distancing recommendations?

A: No. Wearing cloth face coverings is an additional public health measure people should take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. CDC still recommends that you stay at least 6 feet away from other people (social distancing), frequent hand cleaning and other everyday preventive actions. A cloth face covering is not intended to protect the wearer, but it may prevent the spread of virus from the wearer to others. This would be especially important if someone is infected but does not have symptoms.

Q: What type of face covering should be worn?

A: Cloth face coverings can be made from household items or made at home from common materials at low cost. Individuals are encouraged to fashion face coverings from household items such as t-shirts or clean cloth that can cover the nose and mouth area. Soldiers must not cut up Army Combat Uniforms, or use other fabrics that have been chemically-treated, to fashion face coverings. Surgical masks and N95 respirators are in short supply and should be reserved for healthcare workers or other medical first responders, as recommended by CDC guidance.