

# USET Tribal Epidemiology Center Recommendations for Tribal Consideration

USET TEC COVID-19 Guidance 2020-008:

The Community Use of Masks and Face Coverings in Response to COVID-19



## Background

Responses to the COVID-19 outbreak have been focused on using various public health and infection control measures to combat the spread of SARS-CoV-2, also known as the novel coronavirus responsible for COVID-19. Initial public health guidance recommended the use of masks by front-line workers and persons experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. As an understanding of the virus evolved, scientific support for the occurrence of presymptomatic and asymptomatic spread in the population resulted in these recommendations being subsequently expanded to include the widespread use of masks and face coverings in public settings by all community members, regardless of the presence or lack of symptoms.

More recently, the universal use of masks and face coverings has become a key initiative in decreasing the spread of COVID-19 between individuals in community settings and/or in close contact with one another. The guidance below provided aims to increase public awareness and mask-wearing participation, while also continuing to advocate for other public health prevention measures (e.g., handwashing and social distancing) needed to successfully reduce the spread of COVID-19 across all Tribal Nations.

## Current Support for Masks and Face Coverings

- As of recently, state orders and mandates promoting the widespread use of masks by all individuals in public settings have been issued by various governing bodies across the United States to slow the spread of COVID-19. Tribal Nations may decide to veer away from state recommendations depending on the outbreak and its current effect on the community.
- Recommendations have been framed around the current scientific evidence and clinical findings concerning COVID-19 and its transmissibility in various settings (e.g., hospitals) where the use of masks has been well implemented.
- Masks and face coverings aim to (1) prevent potential exposure to others by blocking expelled respiratory droplets and viral particles that are released from sneezing, coughing, and/or talking, and (2) provide personal protection against the inhalation of pathogens (e.g., coronaviruses) and particulates.

## Current Mask and Face Covering Recommendations

- The USET TEC recommends that Tribal Nations consider a mask mandate in community settings such as establishments or businesses (e.g., restaurants, stores, healthcare clinics, schools), and crowded places found in or outside.
- Masks and face coverings commonly used in community settings:
  - Cloth masks and face coverings are recommended for public use and may not provide complete protection to the wearer but may keep the wearer from spreading the virus to others.
  - Surgical masks provide similar protection to that of cloth masks, although non-reusable.
  - The use of N95 respirator masks, surgical masks, face shields, and other face-covering related PPE has been confined to healthcare workers and first responders on the front lines.
- It is recommended that all individuals in the general public 2 years of age and older and able to wear masks or face coverings should do so to decrease transmission of the virus between non-household contacts.
- Driving and walking/jogging alone or in uncrowded areas, where social distancing can be achieved, is considered a low-risk situation in which a face covering may not be needed.

The USET Tribal Epidemiology Center (TEC) is charged under the Indian Health Care Improvement Act with providing epidemiologic and public health support to federally recognized Tribal Nations in the Nashville Area. The USET TEC is a designated public health authority.

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- Safeguards ensuring the proper use of masks and face coverings should be considered for optimal utilization as a widely implemented prevention method (e.g., masks and face coverings should securely cover both the mouth and nose when in use).
- It is advised that community perceptions, the presence or lack of state mask-wearing mandates, and other relevant factors be heavily considered in relaying a unified, clear message regarding the use of masks and face coverings within Tribal communities.

## Additional information on COVID-19 and the use of masks or face coverings

- The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Network: [Universal Masking to Prevent SARS-CoV-2 Transmission—The Time Is Now](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
  - [Considerations for Wearing Cloth Face Coverings](#)
  - [CDC calls on Americans to wear masks to prevent COVID-19 spread](#)
  - Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR): [Factors Associated with Cloth Face Covering Use Among Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, April and May 2020](#)
  - [How to Wash Cloth Face Coverings](#)
- US Food and Drug Administration (FDA): [N95 Respirators, Surgical Masks, and Face Masks](#)