Policy Statement: Gloves, Face Coverings, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
May 5, 2021

This policy statement defines suggested best practices at MIT for the use of gloves, face coverings, and other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the time of COVID-19. The policy was developed by the PPE Committee in coordination with MIT Medical, the Environment, Health and Safety Office (EHS), and the Research Ramp Up Committee.

Wearing face coverings, maintaining physical distance, and washing hands frequently are effective tools in minimizing the spread of this virus. Face coverings limit the spread of airborne particles that may carry virus. Since many individuals who are infected do not experience symptoms, a universal practice of wearing face coverings helps prevent both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals from spreading the virus. Wearing a face covering can help protect you and the people around you, including those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

ON CAMPUS

- **Face coverings, such as cloth coverings or masks, must be worn at all times indoors** on campus, per the orders of the City of Cambridge and the State of Massachusetts. Note that these orders were updated effective April 30, 2021, and face coverings may be removed temporarily when an individual is outdoors and a physical distance of at least six (6) feet from others can be maintained.
  
  You must wear a face covering in:
  - Campus buildings, including shared offices, classrooms, and restrooms
  - Lobbies and hallways
  - Stairwells and elevators
  - Residential common areas such as laundry rooms
  - Garages
  - Outdoors when physical distancing is not possible, in areas such as sidewalks, bus stops, and parking lots
  - **At all times at indoor and outdoor venues and events**
  - **At all times around other people, including outdoors when physical distancing is not possible**

Exceptions include:
- Anyone with a disability, medical condition, or trouble breathing who has explicit approval from the Disability Services and Medical Leave Offices (DSMLO) ([more information available here](#)).
- If an employee is in need of medical services that require the temporary removal of the face mask or covering.
- Temporary removal of face coverings while eating or drinking outdoors is permitted **so long as a distance of at least eight (8) feet from others is maintained at all times**. Note that food should not be shared at any time.
- Dining indoors: Most of the MIT community working on campus continues to be under guidance to eat alone in a closed-door office or designated room if eating indoors. Individuals with access to a designated indoor dining area (for example, residents and Facilities staff) may temporarily remove face coverings while seated to eat or drink in these areas so long as you are able to maintain a
physical distance from others of at least eight (8) feet at all times. Food should not be shared at any time.
  o If an employee is communicating with a hearing-impaired person, and the employee’s mouth needs to be visible.
  o If wearing a mask may introduce a safety hazard into the workplace; check with your DLC for area-specific exceptions.
  o If you are alone in a private office or personal space with a closed door.
  o For residential-specific exceptions, check with Housing and Residential Services.

• Face coverings and face masks are available from MIT for free as needed; it is acceptable to provide your own. Use proper technique for putting on and taking off a face covering or mask.

• Contact your DLC’s administrative officer for information on supplies of face coverings and face masks.

• Cloth face coverings should be washed and kept for reuse.

• Face coverings do not provide the same level of filtration as an N95 respirator; however, when worn properly, they can be effective in reducing the transmission of larger droplets expelled when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice. Wearing a face covering will help protect you and the people around you, including those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

IN LABORATORIES

• Cloth face coverings or face masks must be worn at all times by anyone in a lab.

Exceptions include:
  o Anyone with a disability, medical condition, or trouble breathing who has explicit approval from the Disability Services and Medical Leave Offices (DSMLO) (more information available here).
  o If an employee is in need of medical services that require the temporary removal of the face mask or covering.
  o If an employee is communicating with a hearing-impaired person, and the employee’s mouth needs to be visible.
  o If wearing a mask may introduce a safety hazard into the workplace; check with your DLC for area-specific exceptions.

• It is acceptable to wear the same face covering that you arrived with into the lab and acceptable to leave the lab with the same face covering, provided it is not contaminated with hazardous materials and has not become damaged.
Experiments that did not require a surgical mask or N95 respirator prior to the COVID-19 pandemic do not require these protective devices now; a cloth face covering is sufficient.

It is acceptable to continue using surgical masks or N95 respirators if they are used under normal conditions for protection during the normal course of research activities, such as when a surgical mask is intended to protect the wearer from splashes of potentially contaminated biological fluids. Surgical masks should be used in lieu of cloth face coverings during work in BL2+ containment.

If an experiment previously posed no risk of exposure to hazardous materials when performed without any face covering, there is no additional risk of contaminating the cloth face covering from the same experiment now.

The highest risk of contamination comes from touching the face covering with contaminated gloves. In the event your mask becomes contaminated, please replace your mask. In some cases, a face shield could be used to protect the mask.

The use of engineering controls (such as a fume hood or biosafety cabinet) would also protect the user and face covering from possible contamination.

Use of cloth face coverings and face masks should be carefully reviewed by lab managers and EHS in cases where flames or heat sources are used or when straps could get caught in equipment. Some experiments involving flammable and pyrophoric chemicals may require a flame-resistant face covering as determined through a risk assessment with the PI or DLC. Please contact EHS (environment@mit.edu) for assistance making this determination.

Gloves and gowns:
- There is no change in guidance on wearing gloves. Gloves should continue to be worn to protect oneself from hazardous materials. Gloves should not be worn outside the lab.
- There is no change in guidance for gowns or lab coats.

Sharing of PPE (including lab coats, safety glasses, face shields, and cryogenic gloves) should be avoided, and PPE items should be dedicated to one user only. If sharing PPE cannot be avoided, decontaminate the PPE before and after each use. Please contact EHS (environment@mit.edu) if you have questions about PPE decontamination.