



United States Department of Agriculture
Office of the Deputy Secretary Washington, D.C. 20250

June 8, 2020

COVID-19 Supervisory Guidance on Mandatory Use of Approved Face Coverings and Shields

When USDA employees are required to wear face coverings (to include the additional face shields in indicated positions) at their Primary Duty Location (PDL), supervisors should use the following guidelines:

- Ensure all employees know a face-covering or mask is required within their PDL in common areas. This includes, but is not limited to, when employees enter and exit the building, walk in the hallways, ride elevators, enter and use bathrooms, and attend in person meetings. Masks or face coverings will be available at each open entrance upon request.
- However, an employee who is the sole occupant of a private office or in a shared office where social distancing (six feet or more of separation) can be maintained is not required to wear a face covering or mask when separated via proper social distancing.
- Face coverings or masks will be provided by the facility for each employee upon request when entering the building. Employees should reuse their USDA-provided cloth mask as many as 15 washes before requesting a new mask. Employees who refuse to wear a proper face covering or mask will be denied entry into their PDL. Employees may wear their own face covering or mask, if they choose. A supervisor may also work with the employee to get them a different mask if the employee has a medical condition that prevents or prohibits the use of the provided face covering or mask.
- Employees provided reusable face coverings or masks should ensure they bring the face coverings or masks to their PDL or other work location each workday. If a face covering or mask cannot be immediately provided to an employee who arrives at the PDL without their own reusable face covering or mask, the employee shall immediately notify their first line supervisor. The supervisor shall inform the employee of the option to request leave to cover his/her absence for the day or to cover time to retrieve a face covering or mask and return to duty.
- Failure to maintain and wear a proper face covering or mask may result in administrative action.
- In facilities where a face covering or mask is required, security personnel are authorized to stop employees not wearing a face covering or mask and direct them to retrieve one immediately before moving about the facility. If an employee refuses to comply, security personnel should obtain the employee's and his/her supervisor's name, report the incident to the employee's supervisor, and maintain a record of the incident.
- Should an employee refuse to comply with the requirement, the supervisor should immediately contact the servicing Employee Relations Specialist who will assist the supervisor in assessing the situation and provide appropriate advice and guidance, including a possible recommendation to place the employee on Absent Without Leave (AWOL) status and initiate appropriate administrative action. The employee refusing to comply should not be allowed in the building.
- Employees who indicate they have a medical condition that prevents or prohibits the use of a face covering or mask or requires an alternative type of face covering or masks should be informed of the right to seek a Reasonable Accommodation. The Agency should promptly engage in the interactive process, including options for the employee's work status pending a decision on the accommodation. The supervisor should immediately contact the servicing Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator for appropriate advice and guidance.