



When to Wear Face Coverings: FAQ for Faculty and Staff

The University of South Carolina requires employees (faculty and staff) to wear face coverings in all UofSC owned or leased buildings. Employees must also wear face coverings outdoors on the campus, whenever six (6) feet of separation cannot be maintained. Below is a list of frequently asked questions to assist employees in meeting the University's face covering requirements.

Q: Which areas within a building require the wearing of a face coverings?

A: Areas where employees are expected to wear face coverings include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Entrances/Exits
- Hallways/Stairs
- Elevators
- Breakrooms/Copy rooms
- Bathrooms
- Conference rooms
- Desks that regularly interact with other employees, students, or visitors

Q: When are employees allowed to remove their face covering when they are inside a building?

A: Employees may take off face covering inside buildings when:

- They are alone in an enclosed private office
- They are alone in a private cubicle that has walls high enough to provide a physical barrier to mitigate the spread of respiratory particles under normal circumstances. For example, if the cubicles are in an area where all occupants are normally seated, the walls would need to be as high or higher than the face of a seated person. If the cubicle is in a high traffic area, then the walls would need to be as high or higher than the face of a standing person of average height.

Q: If I am in a private office, do I have to put on my face covering if somebody walks into my office?

A: You should always keep your face covering close to your desk. If somebody walks into your office, you should wear your face covering while interacting with the visitor, even if you are able to maintain six feet of distance.

Q: My desk is in an area where I am the only occupant, however, it is a common pass-through for other employees walking to other offices. Am I required to wear a face covering at all times?

A: Yes, if your desk is in an area that frequently has individuals walking past it, you should wear a face covering at all times. Additionally, those employees walking past your desk should also wear their face coverings when traveling between offices.

Q: There are only three people in my office. Can we take off our face coverings while we work if we all agree that it is acceptable, and nobody is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19?

A: No, employees cannot mutually agree to disregard the university's policy on face coverings. Likewise, individual departments may not amend university guidance or create their own rules regarding the use of face coverings. Only employees in private offices, or private cubicles with high walls, may remove their face coverings.

Q: My office policy allows me to eat or drink at my desk. May I continue to do so during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A: Employees who do not have a private office may continue to eat or drink at their desk if allowed by office policy. However, employees should only take the face covering off while actively eating or drinking. For example, if it takes an employee 30 minutes to drink a soda, they should only remove their face covering between sips and not keep the covering removed for the entire 30 minutes. Likewise, keeping an open bag of chips on a desk is not a valid reason to keep a face covering off for a prolonged period.

Q: Can I eat lunch with my co-workers within a university building?

A: Employees should utilize discretion if it means removing their face coverings for a long period of time surrounded by other individuals. Small groups of employees may eat lunch together provided they maintain a minimum of six feet between all individuals. Face coverings should only be removed while actively eating or drinking and should be replaced as soon as they complete the active consumption of their meals.

Q: A co-worker routinely fails to wear their face covering or wears it improperly. What should I do?

A: Employees are encouraged to politely remind their co-workers of the requirement to wear face coverings. Often, it may be that the employee simply forgot to get their face covering when leaving their office. It can be helpful to have a "ready phrase" already in mind such as, "We are asked to wear face coverings in common spaces" or "We are asked to only have a maximum of five people in the conference room." If the co-worker becomes argumentative, you should immediately cease your dialogue to avoid confrontation. You should then express your concerns to your supervisor to have them address the situation.

Q: What if I am hesitant about talking to my co-worker about wearing their face covering?

A: If you do not feel comfortable addressing the situation directly, you should have a discussion with your supervisor and request that they discuss the face covering requirements with the employee.

Q: What should I do if it is an employee from another department that fails to wear a face covering?

A: Employees are encouraged to respectfully remind fellow employees of the requirement. If you are uncomfortable confronting the employee or they fail to comply, you should then request your supervisor assist by contacting the other department's supervisor for assistance with the issue.

Q: My supervisor has not responded to my request for assistance regarding enforcing face covering requirements. What should I do next?

A: Employees should utilize their chain of supervision. If you have informed your supervisor and given them adequate time to address the situation, you should raise your concerns to your next higher-level supervisor.

Q: What should an employee do if they have a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a face covering?

A: An employee who has a medical condition may have the option of wearing a plastic face shield as an alternative. If neither a shield nor a face covering is a viable option, the employee should request a statement from their health care provider, on the health care provider's letterhead, requesting an exemption from the face covering policy. The statement should not reveal the specific health condition of the employee and only needs to state that it is medically appropriate for the employee to be exempt from the requirement. The statement should also include the following information:

- Name of employee
- Name and contact information of health care provider
- Length of time for the exemption is to remain in effect

The health care provider's statement should be submitted to the supervisor and a copy provided to the department HR contact. If an employee is exempt from wearing a face covering, the supervisor should attempt to provide the employee a private workspace or an area where they may consistently maintain a minimum of six feet of distance from other individuals. Wellness screens may also be needed if the workplace is shared. If appropriate, the exempt employee should also be considered to work remotely.

Q: What will happen to an employee who refuses to wear a face covering?

A: Supervisors should make the university's expectations clear to all employees. Employees who fail to comply are subject to disciplinary action in accordance with HR Policy 1.39, *Disciplinary Action and Termination for Cause*. After a verbal warning, progressive discipline, up to and including termination, is possible for employees who refuse to wear face coverings as required.