

COVID-19: DDSD Mask Wearing Guidance
Originally issued 7/23/2020
Reissued 8/19/2021

There continues to be growing body of evidence that mask/cloth face coverings prevent the person wearing the mask from spreading COVID-19 to others. The main protection individuals gain from masking occurs when others in their communities also wear masks/face coverings (CDC, 2020). As with many things today, our knowledge of COVID-19 and protecting ourselves continues to increase; research on the topic of mask wearing has increased; we now realize the benefits of wearing masks to protect ourselves and others (CDC, 2020; *Public Health Orders and Executive Orders | NMDOH - Coronavirus Updates*, <https://cv.nmhealth.org/public-health-orders-and-executive-orders/>). The evidence does suggest wearing a mask, in conjunction with good, regular hand hygiene, social distancing, and avoiding large gatherings (especially indoors) minimizes the risk to others as well as the mask wearer (CDC, 2020).

The following provides guidance about effective use of mask wearing for individuals in service, for those who may not want to wear them or don't understand why we wear them or why it is important to comply with the Public Health Order requiring masks in all indoor public settings:

- **Model good mask wearing for the individuals you serve.**
- **Masks should be worn appropriately to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and should fit snugly over nose, mouth, and chin.**
- **Discuss the 'Why's' with people**—Behavior is complex and usually determined by more than one factor; so be ready to try to address one or more motivations that people may have for or against mask-wearing!
- **Ask what they know to be true about the reasons for wearing a mask** - it may not be a lack of knowledge.
- **Ask what their reasons for wearing or for not wearing a mask** - in an attempt to meet them where they are at and understanding their personal motivations for and against mask wearing.
- **Ask for permission to share some additional information with them and keep it short.** Keep it simple; Say It's based on the rules/law; for example, "The Governor has ordered it so we don't get sick or make others sick", or "It's a law, we can get fined if we don't wear a mask when we are in indoor public settings." OR say, it is based on science; for example, "COVID-19 travels in the air when someone breathes and who is sick, and when we breathe, we might get sick too."
- **Anxiety:** A mask doesn't block breathing, but it does change the feeling of one's airflow. For some people, this can feel like suffocation (see below, *Feeling Anxious About Wearing A Mask? Here Are 5 Ways to Overcome It*, n.d.).

- **Sensory:** Some people cannot stand having anything covering their face. Some people cannot bear the feeling of mask elastics pulling on their ears. There are a variety of masks, bands, and hats available that minimize this feeling. Be sure to work with your OT.
- **Visibility:** Glasses can fog when wearing masks. Tucking a tissue between the mask and the bridge of your nose or changing your breathing pattern can help.
- **Smell:** Some people are extra sensitive to smell, brushing teeth before trying on a mask may help.
- **Seizure:** Not being able to see a persons' face can be a safety risk if they have distinctive pre-seizure facial expressions. Masks with clear sections have been developed for people who are lip reading.
- **Talk about your own experience with wearing one and why you do it!** "It can get hot, but I know it helps keep all of us safe" (add other potential scripts).
- **Have them practice it before they will be going out in public!** Remember the old saying: "Practice makes perfect!" This is clearly as important as *practicing good hand hygiene!*
- **Have individuals pick out a mask that they like** (masks now make fashion statements, just like other clothes!).
- **Have them practice wearing a mask** for 5 minutes at a time while they go about their daily routine at home (if that's too long, start by having them wear the mask for 10-20-30-60 seconds longer than they feel--or you think--they can tolerate) and increase in small, reasonable increments.

Resources:

- COVID Resources for the Public including COVID Safe Practices. <https://cv.nmhealth.org/public/>
- *Public Health Orders and Executive Orders | NMDOH - Coronavirus Updates.* (n.d.). Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://cv.nmhealth.org/public-health-orders-and-executive-orders>
- CDC Resources for People with Disabilities. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-disabilities.html>
- *Feeling Anxious About Wearing a Mask? Here Are 5 Ways to Overcome It.* (n.d.). Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jessicagold/2020/07/01/feeling-anxious-about-wearing-a-mask-here-are-5-ways-to-overcome-it/#98d1eed46296>