



**Alameda County Health Care Services Agency
Public Health Department**

Colleen Chawla, Director
Kimi Watkins-Tartt, Director
Erica Pan, MD, Interim Health Officer

**Office of the Director
1000 Broadway, Suite 500
Oakland, CA 94607**

**Neetu Balram Public Information Officer
510-267-2801**

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CONTACT: Neetu Balram, Public Information Manager

PHONE: 925-803-7890

EMAIL: eoc-pio@acgov.org

New Bay Area Public Health Recommendation to Cover the Face

Cloth face coverings, when combined with physical distancing and hand washing, may prevent transmission of coronavirus to others when leaving the house for essential activities.

Medical masks should be preserved for health care workers and first responders

Bay Area health officials are recommending residents cover their nose and mouth with cloth when leaving home for essential travel such as to doctor appointments, grocery shopping or pharmacy visits.

The regional recommendation aligns with new guidance from the California Department of Public Health ([California Department of Public Health website](#)).

The face coverings do not have to be hospital grade but need to cover the nose and mouth. For example, bandanas, fabric masks and neck gaiters are acceptable. Fabric covers and bandanas can be washed and used again.

We do not recommend that the public use medical masks (N-95 or surgical masks), which are in limited supply and must be preserved for our health care workers and pre-hospital transport providers.

Up until now, local officials have not recommended the large-scale use of face coverings, but circumstances have changed. As more data emerges about infectiousness of people with mild or no symptoms, there may be potential benefit to all people covering their nose and mouth to contain droplets when in public.

“While there is no replacing the important role of physical distancing and handwashing, wearing face coverings is one more tool to prevent the spread of this virus in our community,” said Dr. Erica Pan, Alameda County Health Officer.

Covering the nose and mouth with cloth also may be beneficial as a reminder to keep physical distancing. Health officials continue to stress that staying home, frequent hand washing and physical distancing are the best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Acceptable face coverings can be made of a variety of cloth materials, be factory-made or hand-sewn, or can be improvised using bandanas, scarves, t-shirts, sweatshirts or towels. Face coverings should be washed frequently with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle.

Ideally, wash your face covering after each use, and have a dedicated laundry bag or bin. Make sure the covering is comfortable – you don't want to have to keep adjusting the mask, which means touching your face. Always wash your hands, or use hand sanitizer, before AND after touching your face or face coverings.