

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK



COVID-19 Guidance

Surgical/Cloth Masks: Reducing Potential Exposure

To help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and sustain a sufficient workforce to provide continuity of service throughout our communities, the IAFF strongly recommends that members begin wearing surgical masks at the fire station and to consider donning a surgical mask at home around family members.

In addition, due to potential transmission concerns, the IAFF urges members not to reuse the same mask worn in the station in the home environment. Given global shortages of PPE, we recommend implementing this practice as much as practicable.

Facemasks can also be used to reduce the risk of transmission. Importantly, facemasks should be worn as part of a comprehensive plan that builds and augments existing infection control practices, such as hand hygiene, disinfecting surfaces, social distancing and other recommended mitigation strategies, including self-monitoring for symptoms prior to shift, limiting or having designated personnel who respond to calls involving confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases, and quarantining or isolating when appropriate.

Guidance Procedures for Donning Surgical/Cloth Masks at the Fire Station

- For each shift, members are advised to wear a surgical mask while at the fire station and when in public for the full duration of their shift. Members may consider changing surgical masks every eight to 12 hours while on shift, if possible, based on available supplies. Also, change masks if they become damaged or soiled.
- When exiting the fire apparatus or ambulance on emergency calls, members should switch to the N95 and properly store the surgical mask until the call is over. If an emergency call does not require the use of an N95 or SCBA, the surgical mask should remain in place. **NOTE: The IAFF strongly recommends members follow our position on donning N95 respirators or higher protection when assessing, treating or transporting suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients.**
- In addition to donning a surgical mask while on shift, consider practicing social distancing throughout the station, including in the dining area/kitchen table, bunk rooms, CPAP machines, workout room, etc. Minimize potential risk as much as possible and practical.
- Members should also consider donning a surgical mask while at home and off duty. If you are not comfortable wearing a surgical mask at home, then ensure you are social distancing, exercising proper hand hygiene and disinfecting surfaces.
- Surgical masks are preferred as they provide some protection for the wearer, but if supply is low cloth masks can be substituted when at the station or at home. Cloth facemasks offer limited protection compared to the surgical mask; their main purpose is to protect those around from contracting the virus if the wearer is asymptomatic or has mild symptoms.
- Continue [self-screening](#) (e.g., assessing the nature of and progression of any symptoms, temperature checks) both on and off duty.
- If you feel ill or have any concerns, contact your supervisor, union representative and healthcare provider, as well as refer to IAFF resources for more information. www.iaff.org/coronavirus