

General Policy:

*The CDC has recently determined that it is safe for vaccinated individuals to be indoors without wearing face coverings. Therefore, **vaccinated individuals** may continue to wear face coverings but are not required to do so while in state facilities or outdoors. All **unvaccinated individuals**, including both state employees and members of the public, should continue to properly wear face coverings while in state facilities. Additionally, unvaccinated employees are required to properly wear face coverings in other enclosed buildings while on state business.*

Face covering guidance applies to all state facilities throughout the State of Wisconsin regardless of the physical distance between individuals or the number of people present. This includes while waiting to enter a facility, cubicles, offices, conference rooms, elevators, stairwells, kitchenettes, bathrooms, hallways, and corridors.

Additionally, face coverings are strongly recommended for all individuals when outdoors on state-managed property in situations when it is not possible to maintain six feet of physical distancing. Employees will also continue to adhere to agency direction if additional or different personal protective equipment has been provided by the agency. Employees who are unable to wear a face covering should be directed to human resources for further assistance. These reasons may include a medical or mental health condition, disability, or job duties in which wearing a face covering would cause a health or safety risk.

The term “mask” or “face mask” may be used throughout these questions and should be considered synonymous with “face covering.”

Note: All employees, regardless of vaccination status, are required to follow all federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including business guidance, when working on non-state property. Failure to follow this guidance or any law, rule, or regulation may result in disciplinary action.

The Departments of Corrections, Health Services, and Veterans Affairs may issue additional regulations for their employees, residents, and visitors of congregate living facilities.

1. What is considered a face covering?

A face covering is defined as: a piece of cloth or other material that is worn to cover the nose and mouth completely. Cloth face coverings must be made with two or more layers of breathable fabric that is tightly woven (i.e., fabrics that do not let light pass through when held up to a light source).

A face covering does not include bandanas, single layer neck gaiters, face shields, goggles, scarves, ski masks, balaclavas, shirt or sweater collars pulled up over the mouth and nose, or masks with slits, exhalation valves, or punctures.

2. Will I be required to share my vaccination status with others and/or show proof of vaccination with regards to wearing a face covering??

Unless otherwise specified in an agency-specific policy (see “Note” above), verification of vaccine status (e.g., by showing a vaccine card) will not be required for employees to go without a face covering indoors. Verification of an employee’s vaccine status will only be sought in the context of a potential disciplinary action if there is credible evidence that an employee is misrepresenting their vaccine status solely to avoid face covering requirements.

3. How do I wear a mask while I’m eating or drinking?

Employees are permitted to remove masks while eating and drinking but unvaccinated employees should wear them when retrieving food from the refrigerator, vending machine, reheating or otherwise preparing food.

4. I am not able to wear a mask due to a medical condition, mental health reason, or disability. What should I do?

Unvaccinated employees who are unable to wear a mask due to a medical or mental health condition, or disability, should contact their human resources representative (e.g., medical, or reasonable accommodation coordinator) to complete a reasonable accommodation request. Medical documentation is not necessarily required. Employees who need to provide medical documentation will be advised during the process.

5. I am not able to wear a mask based on a religious belief. What should I do?

Unvaccinated employees who are unable to wear a mask based on a religious belief should contact their human resources representative to discuss and potentially request an accommodation. Employees may be required to submit documentation for management to review an accommodation request based on a religious belief.

6. Can I wear a face shield instead of a face mask?

No. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), it is not known if face shields provide protection to others from the spray of respiratory particles. CDC does not recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings.

However, a face shield may be permitted for staff who have difficulty breathing through a mask or have received guidance from a medical provider. In this instance, the unvaccinated employee should discuss their concerns with human resources.

7. What do I do if I see someone not wearing a mask, even though they should be?

Nothing. Some people have conditions or circumstances that would make wearing a cloth face covering difficult or dangerous. Follow the procedures for your personal circumstances. Employees who have concerns regarding face covering compliance are encouraged to discuss their concerns with their supervisor or human resources.

Employees and supervisors are prohibited from discriminating against individuals who choose to wear a face covering regardless of the reason. Please remember that there are a multitude of reasons why someone may choose to wear a face covering and wearing a face covering is not necessarily an indication that the person is not vaccinated.

8. Are there any other exceptions to the mask requirement?

- Employees who work in a setting where cloth face coverings may increase the risk of [heat-related illness](#) or cause safety concerns due to introduction of a hazard (for instance, straps getting caught in equipment) may consult with an occupational safety and health professional to determine the appropriate face covering for their setting.
- As permitted by your agency, unvaccinated employees, while working alone in your own private office, a conference room, or other enclosed space **with the door closed**, do not need to wear a mask, provided you can put on a face covering quickly if someone enters. If the door is open or you leave the enclosed space, you are required to wear a mask. Employees are reminded to wipe down surfaces in their office with available disinfectant spray before leaving for the day. If you remove your mask in a conference room, you must sanitize hard surfaces and anything you touch in a conference room both upon entering and before vacating the space.
- Face coverings may be removed when communicating with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, and when communication cannot be achieved through other means.
- Face coverings may be removed to confirm identity if requested

9. If a member of the public is not wearing a mask, can I deny them service?

No, although signage at state facilities will ask that members of the public who are unvaccinated properly wear a mask, the State will not deny service for this reason. Members of the public should follow their local health department's guidance regarding the use of masks. Part of the reason to require employees to wear masks is to ensure the employee's personal protection. Masks will be available to members of the public doing business with the State.

10. If I cannot deny service to a member of the public without a mask, can I ask them to wear a mask or to explain why they are not wearing a mask?

Signage at state facilities will make clear to members of the public that they are being asked to wear a mask if they are unvaccinated, and so employees should not also ask or require members of the public to wear a mask. Additionally, employees may not ask members of the public if they are unvaccinated, meet the exception criteria or require them to explain why they are not wearing a mask. State employees are not responsible for ensuring the public's compliance with health or emergency orders and will respect individuals' privacy, which may include medical information or personal history. As a reminder, employees should similarly not be making these inquiries of their co-workers.

11. Is it true that I could be subject to discipline for refusing to wear a mask if I do not have an approved reasonable accommodation?

Yes, as is true for any required protective equipment, employees who refuse to wear a mask without authorization to do so may be subject to discipline up to and including termination. While we will make every effort to work with the personal circumstances of each employee, this has been a requirement for all employees since July 13, 2020.