

# OSHA Issues Guidance Addressing Face Covering Concerns

Insights

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Responding to several points of concern regarding the use of face coverings in the workplace, [OSHA issued detailed policy guidance](#) supporting their use. Adding to its COVID-19 FAQs, [OSHA posted an answer to the question](#), “Does wearing a medical/surgical mask or cloth face covering cause unsafe oxygen levels or harmful carbon dioxide levels to the wearer?” OSHA’s answer attests to both the safety of wearing face coverings and that it does not, by itself implicate certain OSHA standards.

OSHA opined that face coverings “do not compromise [the wearer’s] oxygen levels or cause carbon dioxide buildup.” In that regard, according to OSHA, face coverings protect against respiratory droplets, which are larger than carbon dioxide particles. As a result, face coverings provide protection against virus-carrying droplets but do not prevent the release of carbon dioxide.

OSHA also responded to concerns that the wearing of face coverings in the workplace implicates certain mandatory standards, namely 29 C.F.R. §1910.134 (Respiratory Protection), 29 C.F.R. §1910.146 (Permit-Required Confined Space) and 29 C.F.R. §1910.1000 (Air Contaminants). OSHA clarified that these standards do not apply to settings that involve normal ambient air. Rather, they only apply to work settings where there are known or suspected sources of chemicals or where workers are required to enter a potentially dangerous location. Therefore, the use of face coverings in the workplace, by itself, does not implicate an OSHA standard.

In previous answers to FAQs, OSHA stopped short of stating that employers are required to provide face coverings to employees as they do not constitute PPE. Employers also retain discretion as to whether to require that face covering be used, particularly if doing so would cause a hazard or compromise the use of PPE. Nevertheless, OSHA “generally recommends that employers encourage workers to wears face coverings at work” in accordance with CDC recommendations. The new guidance furthers OSHA’s position as to the propriety of wearing face coverings in the workplace where feasible.

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