



Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.  
The original outplacement company



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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **The New Normal in the Office**

### **GUIDELINES FOR WEARING MASKS AT WORK**

**CHICAGO, June 1, 2020** – Business attire has a new component during the COVID-19 pandemic. Face masks are available in every conceivable pattern and color these days. In fact, Forbes reports fashion designers are creating masks to accentuate their high-style collections, and many retailers and manufacturers are pivoting to making masks to not only help with the shortage, but also to keep their businesses intact. Masks will be a part of the new normal as offices begin to reopen, and employers will need to state clear guidelines on if, when, how, and where they should be worn, according to one workplace authority.

“As businesses reopen and establish new policies and procedures, safety is a priority. For many, wearing a mask will be required of employees to ensure that safety,” said Andrew Challenger, Senior VP of outplacement and business and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

Cloth face coverings do not protect the wearer, but are worn to protect others from contracting COVID-19 from respiratory droplets. The CDC recommends that cloth masks be worn whenever people leave their homes if they cannot ensure social distancing will be practiced. It does not recommend masks be worn by children under age two or by anyone who may have trouble breathing while wearing the mask.

“Regulations differ widely – by state, by city, by industry, by company. Some governmental bodies require masks of certain workers; some simply recommend masks. Some states mandate employers pay for masks, provide them, or reimburse employees who buy their own,” said Challenger.

“Employers have the right to require employees wear masks. If a worker refuses, the company should make every effort to explain the reasons why masks are recommended. Above all, the company should explain the policy exists to ensure work environments are safe,” he added.

Requiring masks has become controversial, and many people do not feel they should be forced to comply with such rules.

“Some workers may not understand that wearing a mask protects others, not the wearer. Others may be taking a political stance, as masks have become a wedge issue,” Challenger said.

“Employers need to create, implement, and enforce clear policies so their workers know what is expected of them in the office,” he added.

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), “an employer may require employees to wear protective gear (for example, masks and gloves) and observe infection control practices (for example, regular hand washing and social distancing protocols). However, where an employee with a disability needs a related reasonable accommodation under the ADA (e.g., non-latex gloves, modified face masks for interpreters or others who communicate with an employee who uses lip reading, or gowns designed for individuals who use wheelchairs), or a religious accommodation under Title VII (such as modified equipment due to religious garb), the employer should discuss the request and provide the modification or an alternative if feasible and not an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business under the ADA or Title VII.”

“Employers will have a number of questions to answer as they move forward in reopening their businesses. Many will take the lead of the CDC and use its guidelines to make decisions, but each company is different and will no doubt face unique challenges,” said Challenger.

Guidelines should be created and distributed to make company policy clear. Challenger offered the following questions employers should consider:

- Detail who is required to wear a mask, when masks must be worn, and where masks must be worn. Is it okay to remove a mask once an employee is in a personal cubicle or office? Is it okay for employees who have to be on the phone all day to remove masks so their voices won't be muffled? If so, how will the company guarantee those employees can safely distance themselves while performing their duties?
- Who will pay for the masks? Will the company provide masks to employees?
- Will visitors, clients, customers, and other members of the public be required to be masked when on company property?
- If the company is not requiring masks, will employees who want to wear them be allowed to do so?
- Will there be a dress code for masks? Does anything go, or will more conservative prints or colors be the only ones allowed? Will the company provide masks to workers or reimburse employees for the expense?
- Train employees on the proper way to wear a mask. CDC guidelines tell people to wash their hands before putting on a face covering, place the covering over the nose and mouth and secure it under the chin, fit it snugly against the sides of the face, be sure breathing is easy, don't put the covering around the neck or up on the forehead, and don't touch the face covering (wash hands if the mask is touched).

- How should masks be discarded?
- What are the consequences for employees who resist wearing masks? Be clear. Where appropriate, union representatives should be informed of policy updates.

“Tensions can be eased a bit if companies recognize it may take some time to get used to masks being a part of every workday,” Challenger said.

“Provide attractive, comfortable masks with company logos to boost morale. Allow employees to express themselves and wear a favorite mask on casual Fridays. Adopt a color-coordinated schedule so everyone wears blue masks on Monday, red masks on Tuesdays, etc.,” he added.

Many employers plan to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to their workers. In a survey conducted among 301 Human Resources executives in mid-April, 38% reported they would offer PPE to all workers.

<b>Do you plan to provide any PPE to workers?</b>	
Yes, we will provide gloves and/or masks to all workers.	37.50%
Yes, we will provide gloves and/or masks to some of our workers.	26.19%
We will allow workers to bring their own PPE.	18.45%
No, we have no plans to distribute equipment.	10.71%
Unsure.	7.14%
We will provide for those who want them.	2.38%
We are having a difficult time sourcing PPE.	1.79%

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

“Employers who provide face coverings will ease the anxiety workers are feeling that all areas of the company are equally safe. This provides consistency across the company both in what masks look like and who is required to wear them, making for a happier and safer environment,” said Challenger.

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