



NEW HANOVER COUNTY

COUNTY MANAGER'S OFFICE

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Administrative Memorandum

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Approved By:	Chris Coudriet, County Manager

Face Coverings on New Hanover County Property Policy

I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

On July 27, 2021 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued recommendations for face coverings in public indoor settings in areas of substantial or high transmission to prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19.

On August 17, 2021, The New Hanover County Health and Human Services (HHS) Board voted unanimously to move forward with a proposed health rule to mandate face coverings in all indoor public places within New Hanover County, to include offices and workplaces, business establishments, public transportation facilities and vehicles, and any place the public is invited or allowed to assemble.

In order to ensure the continuity of operations for New Hanover County government services, a face covering policy is necessary for all employees and visitors while conducting business indoors.

II. DEFINITIONS

Face Coverings:

A face covering is a material that covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with tie or straps or simply wrapped around the lower face. It can be made of a variety of materials, such as cotton, silk, or linen. A cloth face covering may be factory-made, sewn by hand or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels. Ideally, a face covering has two or more layers. Cloth face coverings should be washed frequently and should not be used if they no longer cover the nose and mouth, have stretched out or have damaged ties or straps, cannot stay on the face, or have holes or tears in the fabric. Plastic face shields are not considered face coverings for this policy.

III. POLICY

Face coverings that securely cover the nose and mouth are required to be worn by employees, regardless of vaccination status or the ability to social distance from others while conducting county business indoors (including inside county facilities, county vehicles, and any other indoor space). Face Coverings are also required to be worn by visitors inside all New Hanover County facilities.

IV. ORGANIZATIONS/INDIVIDUALS IMPACTED

This administrative memorandum applies to all New Hanover County employees and visitors to New Hanover County facilities.

V. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

New Hanover County employees are required to wear face coverings that securely cover the nose and mouth while indoors at all New Hanover County facilities. This includes all county-owned vehicles.

Citizens who enter county buildings will be required to wear a face covering, which will be communicated through signage that will be placed on all entrances and by greeters (if applicable).

VI. INTERNAL PROCESSES

A. New Hanover County Employees

Employees may request an exemption from this policy of wearing a face covering due to a behavioral condition or disability that may prohibit a face covering from being worn must contact Human Resources for guidance.

Activities that exempt employees from wearing a face covering include when individuals are:

- 1) actively eating or drinking;
- 2) seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing- impaired in a way that requires the mouth to be visible;
- 3) giving a speech or performance for a broadcast, or to an audience, where they maintain a distance of at least 20 feet from the audience;
- 4) working at home;
- 5) temporarily removing their face covering for identification purposes to secure government or medical services;
- 6) temporarily at risk from wearing a face covering at work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulations or workplace safety guidelines;
- 7) operating equipment or a vehicle and the face covering is impeding their visibility;
- 8) alone in an enclosed space, such as a room, office, or vehicle;
- 9) participating in worship, religious, spiritual gatherings, funeral ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, and other activities constituting the exercise of First Amendment rights,

therefore are exempt from all requirements of this Rule, notwithstanding any other provision of this Rule.

Failure by employees to comply with this policy will be considered insubordination, which is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

B. Visitors and Customers inside County Facilities

- 1) Individuals from the public who are seeking service from New Hanover County must wear a face covering unless they claim an authorized exemption. Exemptions are based on the honor system. If an individual is not wearing a face covering, they will be offered a face covering. If someone claims an authorized exemption and is not wearing a face covering, they should be offered in-person service, but staff can encourage remote service where possible. If the individual does not claim an exemption and refuses to leave, a county employee will call 911 for a sheriff's deputy to escort the individual from the facility.
- 2) Individuals from the public who are inside a county facility and not seeking service from New Hanover County must wear a face covering. Exemptions will not be recognized. If the individual refuses to wear a face covering, they will be asked to leave. If they refuse to leave the facility, a county employee will call 911 for a sheriff's deputy to escort the individual from the facility.
- 3) Individuals from the public who participate in indoor meetings of the Board of Commissioners, Planning Board, Health and Human Services Board, or any other county board or committee are required to wear face coverings and exemptions will not be recognized.
 - a. Face Covering requirements will be noted on all agendas and, if the meeting includes an opportunity for public comments, an email address will be provided for comments to be submitted by a predetermined deadline. Written comments will be provided to the board during the public hearing(s) or appropriate time and the board chair is to acknowledge receipt during the public hearing or submit comments into the record during the public hearing and/or public comment period.
 - b. If someone attends a meeting and does not have a face covering, they will be offered a face covering. If they refuse to wear a face covering, they will not be allowed to attend the meeting in person. Individuals will be provided instructions on viewing or listening to the meeting remotely. County staff are responsible for making the public aware of the face covering requirement. Sheriff's deputy(ies) will be posted when appropriate at the entrance of meetings to ensure compliance.
- 4) Children under two (2) years of age should not wear a face covering.

VII. POLICY EVALUATION

The policy will be evaluated in the context of the spread of communicable diseases in our community and in compliance with federal, state, and local orders.