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Acknowledging why Communities of Color have Concerns with Wearing Face Coverings during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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A day after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) announcement on April 3, 2020 encouraging the general public to wear a face covering in addition to continuing to practice social distancing, Aaron Thomas, who lives in Ohio, said on Twitter that he did not feel safe wearing a handkerchief or anything else over his nose and mouth that "isn't clearly a protective mask" because he is black. "I want to stay alive but I also want to stay alive," he wrote in his message. This tweet was picked up by the New York Times and included in an [article](#) titled "*For Black Men, Fear That Masks Will Invite Racial Profiling: African-American men worry that following the C.D.C. recommendation to cover their faces in public could expose them to harassment from the police*".

Franklin County Public Health (FCPH) understands and supports the need for all people to wear face coverings when out in public during COVID-19 to help decrease the possibility of spread and to help flatten the curve. We also understand that there are communities of color, such as African Americans, Latinxs, New Americans and Asian populations, who have expressed general reluctance in wearing face coverings in public due to the possibility of racial profiling from law enforcement and discrimination while in public spaces. In these unprecedented times of COVID-19 it is important that we share thoughtful and timely information as we navigate this uncharted territory together. Below are articles that may be of interest in understanding why communities of color have concerns regarding face mask / face coverings. If you are unable to click the links below, simply type article title in your search engine.

[Boston Globe: Why I Don't Feel Safe Wearing a Face Covering](#)

[The Atlantic: Coronavirus Exposing Our Racial Divides](#)

[The Washington Post: Americas Racial Educational Divide](#)

[ProPublica: Racial Disparities Among COVID-19](#)

[The Washington Post: Social Distancing Enforcement is Ramping Up So Is Concern That Black and Latino Residents May Face Harsher Treatment](#)

[LA Times Op-Ed: You're white and don't care about wearing a mask? Asian Americans don't have that privilege](#)

[KPBS.org: Coronavirus-Related Harassment And Discrimination Impacts Mental Health, Spreads Fear In Asian American Community](#)

[Anchorage Daily News: Who's best about wearing masks in public?](#)

On May 12, 2020 the FCPH Board of Health, declared racism a public health crisis. We did so in recognition that communities of color, those of low social economic status and those that suffer from disabilities, are more likely to experience poor health outcomes as a result of racist and discriminatory practices that have led to health inequities stemming from the social determinants of health, including economic instability, unstable physical environment, lack of educational opportunity and reduced access to health care.

FCPH wants to ensure that all individuals feel safe and can protect themselves from COVID-19 when out in public by wearing a face covering. In support of that effort, we are providing this educational opportunity as general guidance and will continue to work closely with partner agencies and community organizations on this issue. What's ultimately true is that the CDC protective guidance should not be disregarded as a protective measure nor should the vulnerabilities that communities of color have expressed be dismissed.

Our general recommendations for wearing face covering can be found on our [website](#). Outlined below are the specific recommendations from that guidance:

- Protect yourself and others by wearing a mask/face covering
- Whenever possible, choose medical or commercial grade masks.
- When putting on a mask/face covering - Secure ties or elastic bands at middle of head and neck - Fit flexible band to nose-bridge - Fit snug to face and below chin.
- When removing a mask/face covering remember the front is contaminated — DO NOT TOUCH!
- Grasp ties or elastics of the mask/face covering and remove without touching the front.
- Discard in a waste container or immediately wash if cloth mask/face covering.
- Wash hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately after removing your mask/face covering.

FCPH leads our communities in achieving optimal health for all Franklin County residents, and our overarching strategic goal is optimal health for all residents. Optimal health for all residents means we must achieve our strategic goal of equity. Therefore, especially in times of crisis, FCPH and its partners must focus on serving vulnerable communities that have historically and disproportionately lived with poor health outcomes whenever the community at large is facing a challenge. This global pandemic has proven to be no different in this regard. We are committed to continuing to have real conversations around how these policies impact marginalized communities. As the landscape and recommendations about wearing a mask/face covering change this document will be updated to accommodate current information.

This document replaces the Face Mask and Racial Equity guidance FCPH posted in April. Franklin County Public Health humbly thanks and appreciates all the agencies listed below for their willingness to come to the table, have authentic conversations and partner with us to draft this educational guidance document:

***African American Male Wellness Agency
Columbus Branch NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)
Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services (ETSS)
Franklin County Board of Commissioners
Franklin County Children Services
Franklin County Board of Health
Franklin County Public Health
Ohio Asian American Health Coalition
Ohio Latino Affairs Commission
Ohio State University College of Medicine Department of Family Medicine
Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center Community Development
Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center Government Affairs and Community Relations
Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center
Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
Partnership4Success
National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), Columbus Section
United Way of Central Ohio
YWCA of Central Ohio***