

Use of Surgical Masks During the H1N1 (formerly swine flu) Outbreaks

You have requested a surgical mask as a measure of protection during the current influenza outbreak. The Postal Service will provide surgical masks when available. Use of a mask is only a part of what you should be doing to avoid influenza. Frequent hand washing and avoiding close contact with other persons at work and home, are equally or more important in avoiding disease.

Surgical masks are recommended by OSHA (in a pandemic situation) for employees at “medium risk”--which means employees who routinely have frequent contact with customers and others, such as window clerks and carriers. While any employee who asks for a mask will be provided one, if available, please consider whether you are in the “medium risk” category. If not, consider following the other measures for your protection and conserving the limited stock of masks.

The Postal Service will attempt to provide one mask per requesting employee per day. Please take care of the mask. Handle the mask only by the straps when putting it on or taking it off. Avoid contact with the outer surface. If you remove the mask for lunch breaks or other purposes, try to store the mask in a clean place (such as a locker, or fold it in a clean piece of paper and place it in your pocket). Don't leave it in common areas such as break rooms. When you are done with the mask for the day, remove it by the straps and deposit it in the nearest trash bin.

If the mask causes irritation or any other discomfort (such as difficulty breathing) take it off and notify your supervisor.