

All about masks: FAQs and recommendations



Why are we wearing masks?

In December 2019, researchers discovered a new infectious coronavirus (also known as COVID-19 or SARS-CoV-2) in Wuhan, China. Current research shows that COVID-19 spreads primarily through respiratory droplets produced when you sneeze, shout, or cough. The CDC has included wearing masks/facial coverings in its recommendations to reduce transmission of the virus. Facial coverings work by providing a barrier to those respiratory droplets, protecting you from spreading germs to others and helping reduce the risk of you catching a droplet-spread virus.

What should I look for when picking a mask/facial covering?

For the general public, a cloth mask made of more than 2 layers of fabric is recommended. The mask should fit snugly over your nose/cheekbones, under your chin, and should have minimal gaps near your ears. Thicker fabrics work better; the less you can see through the fabric, the better it is at filtering and trapping germs. N95 respirators and surgical masks should be reserved for healthcare workers. Face shields can be worn in addition to masks or in place of masks for individuals who have health conditions that prevent them from wearing masks; remember that face shields prevent direct contact of droplets with the face, but do not filter air or trap circulating droplet particles.

Face masks: **The type of fabric matters**

Choose material that filters out infectious particles. Doubling up on the fabric to make two layers or more is best.



Davies A, Thompson K-A, Kariuki S, Kibuka S, Makur J and Barnard A-M. Testing the efficacy of homemade masks: Would they protect us from influenza 'Pandemic'? 2020. Disaster medicine and public health preparedness. 7, 413-416. 10.1017/dmp.2019.43.



How do I keep my mask clean?

Wash or sanitize your hands before putting your mask on and after taking your mask off. Avoid touching your mask while wearing it. Seal your mask in a plastic bag between uses; you can spray the front of the mask with a 70% isopropyl alcohol for daily sanitizing, or make an alcohol solution with 3 parts 90% isopropyl alcohol and one part water. Wash your cloth mask weekly with your regular laundry.

What kind of mask should I wear while teaching?

There is no perfect answer to this. All forms of masks, when worn properly over the nose and under the chin, help reduce the rate of COVID-19 transmission. Some face masks are available online with a clear panel to allow facial expressions.

Can I remove my mask during teaching if I am six feet away from my students and wearing a face shield?

The safest option is to continue to wear a mask during the day; face shields help protect against direct contact of virus particles, but there are still gaps where droplets can enter.

How do I eat/drink safely with the mask?

If you are going to eat a meal or take a drink, sanitize or wash your hands and remove the mask by grasping the loops behind your ears and pulling them straight forward and off. Place the mask in a sealable plastic bag, and then sanitize your hands again. Enjoy your meal/beverage, and then wash your hands before putting the mask back on. Always remember that anytime you need to touch your mask, sanitize or wash your hands before and after touching it.