

PUBLIC HEALTH | INFORMATION SERIES

Face Coverings in a Pandemic

A face covering is a simple barrier placed over the face and nose and worn by the public (everyone in a community) during an epidemic or pandemic such as Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19).

Three crucial measures combined can help control the spread of COVID-19:

1. Wear a face covering
2. Stay at least 6 feet [2 meters] from people who do not live in your household (social distancing)
3. Wash your hands regularly

Why do I need a face covering?

- COVID-19 is spread primarily through respiratory droplets. Respiratory droplets are released into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs, sings, or even talks.
- Close contact with a person infected with COVID-19 or touching a contaminated surface are the most common ways that you can become infected from a respiratory droplet.
- People infected with COVID-19 may not show any signs or symptoms of infection but can still make others sick.

Who needs to wear a face covering?

- Everyone over the age of 2 years of age.
- Children less than 2 years of age, developmentally delayed individuals, or people with severe lung disease may not tolerate a tight fitting face covering. Additionally, anyone who has trouble removing a face covering without assistance should not wear a face covering. In these circumstances, consider a face shield and greater social distancing.

When do I need to wear my face covering?

- Anytime you are out of your house, at work, or in the community

How to wear your face covering¹



Instructions for proper placement

- Wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based (>60% ethanol) hand-sanitizer for at least 20 seconds prior to putting on, touching, adjusting or removing your face covering
- Place the bands around your ears or secure on the back of your head
- The top of the covering should fit securely over your nose, covering your entire nose, mouth and chin
- Take care not to touch the center of the mask

How can I help my child wear a face covering?

- Remember first - always wear your face covering as you are your child's biggest role model.
- Put the mask on a stuffed toy to show the child how it works.
- Show your child pictures of other children wearing masks.
- Talk about being a super hero with a mask to protect others.
- Practice often at home so your child gets used to wearing the mask and not touching or pulling on it. Give your child positive feedback for good behavior.

PATIENT EDUCATION | **INFORMATION SERIES****What is the recommended material for face covering?**

- Your face covering should contain at least two layers of fabric, most commonly cotton.
- Additional layers or different types of fabric may provide additional barrier protection but may also cause greater discomfort or shortness of breath.

How is a face covering different from a respirator?

- A respirator is a type of personal protective equipment (PPE) used by people in high-risk jobs such as healthcare workers where the risk of exposure is higher than the public.
- A respirator must be properly tested for fit and seal. For this reason and because they are a scarce resource during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are generally reserved for healthcare workers.
- A face covering is different from a respirator as a face covering is used primarily to protect others, however, it may have some benefit in protecting you as well.

When should I consider PPE?

- Remember, the likelihood of being infected with COVID-19 increases when a person is in close contact with others and/or is in a poorly ventilated (reduced air exchange) area for an extended period. The best way to reduce your risk of COVID-19 is to avoid close contact with others. If this is not possible and you are considering use of a respirator, we recommend discussing your risk of COVID-19 with your primary provider.
- If you are high risk or are required to be in a high risk circumstance:
 - ▶ consider using a face shield together with a face covering of PPE
 - ▶ before starting to wear PPE, discuss with your healthcare provider as proper fit testing is required.
- We discourage the use of masks with an exhalation valve, as the virus may be able to leave or enter the mask and not be as effective at reducing the spread of COVID-19 to others.

Face coverings should:

- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- Be secured with ties or ear loop bands
- Include at least 2 layers of fabric
- Allow for breathing without restriction
- Be hand washed or laundered and machine dried without damage or change in its shape

In addition to wearing a face covering, we strongly recommend:

- Cleaning your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based (>60% ethanol) hand-sanitizer multiple times per day
- Avoid touching your face or eyes
- Limiting non-essential travel
- Regular washing of your face covering, preferably daily
- Changing your face covering when wet or damp

Not everyone has access to face coverings, hand sanitizer, clean water or the opportunity to perform social distancing from others. Your public health department or local hospital may be able to supply face coverings for your community.

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Additional Information**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/using-ppe.html>

World Health Organization

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association

- <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2765525>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p0714-americans-to-wear-masks.html>

AAP website Healthy Children.org

- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Cloth-Face-Coverings-for-Children-During-COVID-19.aspx>

American Thoracic Society

- www.thoracic.org/patients/
 - COVID-19: How Do We Stay Safe?
- <https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/covid-19-how-do-we-stay-safe.pdf>

Ng5decon.org

- <https://www.ng5decon.org/publications#masks-for-public-use>

¹ <https://www.utsouthwestern.edu/covid-19/work-on-campus/masking.html>

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