Face Coverings in a Pandemic

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A face covering is a simple barrier placed over the face and nose. During an epidemic or a pandemic, such as the Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, there may be times when individuals or entire communities need to wear a face covering to control the spread of disease. Almost everyone who is 2 years and older can wear a mask. Some people who have severe lung disease cannot tolerate a mask. If a person cannot wear a mask a face shield will offer some limited protection.

Instructions for proper mask 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.
- There should not be gaps on the sides of your face. You can try putting a knot in the surgical mask elastic loops and tucking and flattening the extra material to get a better fit before putting it on.
- Avoid touching the front of the mask.

What face covering should I choose?
A cloth face covering should contain at least two layers of fabric, most commonly cotton. Polypropylene is also often used.

People's faces differ in size and shape. Try to find the mask that gives you best fit and protection based on the placement guidelines above.
- A disposable medical procedure mask can be used. It cannot be cleaned.
- You can consider wearing double masks (such as a cloth mask over a medical procedure mask) that can give you better protection.
- Some people add a plastic mask fitter. It is like a frame and there are different shapes. You mold it to your face and strap it over a medical mask to help it seal better. Be sure to keep the fitter clean.
- We discourage 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.
How can I help my child wear a face covering?

- Always wear your face covering as you are your child’s best 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 at home so your child gets used to wearing the mask. Give your child positive feedback.

Besides masking, what else can I do to stay healthy?

In addition to masking, you can use these basic public health measures to help control the spread of COVID-19 or other respiratory illnesses:

- Get vaccinated
- Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based (>60% ethanol) hand sanitizer multiple times per day
- Follow social distancing (6 feet between people not in your household)
- Avoid touching your face or eyes with unwashed hands
- Stay away from those who are sick, unless you are their caregiver
- Stay home if you are sick

Masks and Related Supplies

- Keep a spare mask available to replace one that is wet or damaged
- Store wet reusable masks in a plastic bag until they can be washed

Not everyone has access to face coverings, hand sanitizer or clean water. Your public health department, community healthcare center, or local hospital may be able to supply face coverings and related services.

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

Ensure your cloth mask can:

- Be washed and dried without damage or changing its shape
- Be washed often, preferably every day, or disposed of
- Be changed if damp or soiled

Additional Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

World Health Organization

JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association
- https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2765525

AAP website Healthy Children.org

American Thoracic Society
- www.thoracic.org/patients/
  - COVID-19: How Do We Stay Safe?
  - What Are COVID-19 Vaccines?
  - How Vaccines Work to Prevent Infections

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

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