Face Coverings in a Pandemic

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, it is recommended that the public (everyone in a community) wear a face covering when they are outside of their home.

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

Even with COVID 19 vaccination, these measures are still needed.

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.
- 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 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.

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.
- 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 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 should consider wearing double masks (such as a cloth mask over a medical procedure mask) that can give you better protection.
- If you have trouble breathing with double masks, wear a single mask but be sure you have a good fit. You can also try using a sheer nylon sleeve over the medical mask to hold it in place.
- 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.

What about using a face shield?
You can consider adding a cleanable face shield over your face to give some added protection against droplets and splashes. You should still wear a mask under the face shield. Shields do not protect as well as masks.

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 protect you as well.

When should I consider PPE?

- 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 or respirator.
  - discuss wearing a respirator (PPE) with your healthcare provider as proper fit testing is required.

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

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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

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

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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?
  - Managing your chronic lung disease during the COVID-19 pandemic
  - Socializing during a pandemic

N95decon.org
- https://www.n95decon.org/publications#masks-for-public-use

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

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