When to wear cloth or non-medical masks, medical masks, and respirators

Masks may be recommended or required in public or crowded settings, with people outside your household. For example: stores, schools, workplaces, and public transit. Wearing a mask is an added layer of protection from COVID-19. Even when not required, it's important to wear a mask.

Non-Medical Masks

Breathable fabric mask with ear loops, bands, or ties. Should fit snug and cover your nose, mouth and chin without gaps.

Medical Masks

Loose, plastic-like fabric with ear loops, bands, or ties. Should fit snug and cover your nose, mouth and chin without gaps.

Respirators

Thick, plastic-like fabric with ear loops, bands, or ties. Respirators should fit snug around your nose, mouth and chin, with little room for air to escape. It's normal to sweat inside the mask.

When to wear...

While non-medical masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19, medical masks and respirators provide better protection.

No matter which type of mask you choose, make sure it fits properly.

Medical masks should be worn if you're:
- at risk of more serious disease or outcomes from COVID-19
- at higher risk of being exposed to COVID-19 because of your living situation

You can also consider using a respirator in these situations. If a medical mask or respirator is not available, you should wear a non-medical mask.

Respirators should be worn by anyone who's
- tested positive for or has symptoms of COVID-19
- taking care of or living with someone with COVID-19
- living with someone in isolation or in quarantine
- lives in a crowded home
- at risk of serious disease or outcomes from COVID-19

If a respirator isn't available, wear a medical mask. If neither are available, wear a non-medical mask.

What you need to know about Masks

Different mask types – different requirements:

Non-medical masks:
- should be made of multiple layers, including 2 layers of tightly woven fabric
- materials that are breathable

Medical masks and respirators:
- construction materials may vary

Do not use masks or respirators with exhalation valves or vents.

A mask fits properly when:

- It completely and comfortably covers the nose, mouth and chin without gaps
- fits snug to your face with ties, bands or ear loops

A mask may provide a better fit if it has:
- a flexible nosepiece
- adjustable ear loops
- ties or bands that go around the back of head

How to care for your mask(s):

Non-medical masks:
- Clean your reusable non-medical mask as soon as it gets dirty, damp or damaged
- Wash reusable non-medical masks with hot, soapy water and dry completely before next use

Medical masks and respirators are typically single use and disposable, but may be reused until visibly dirty, damp or damaged.

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