



Considerations for Wearing Cloth Face Coverings in Public

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued guidance recommending that people wear cloth face coverings in public settings, especially those living in areas with widespread community transmission of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19). The CDC indicated that they issued this guidance in response to emerging evidence about the role that asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic infections play in transmission.

Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for other protective measures

A cloth face covering may protect others from your respiratory secretions, but it does not protect you. At most, wearing face masks may provide a small additional protection to others (e.g., grocery workers, public, etc.) by reducing the release of infectious particles into the air when you speak, cough, or sneeze.

Cloth face coverings should not replace other strategies for slowing the spread of COVID-19.

Other measures remain important and necessary to preventing the spread of SARS-CoV-2, including social distancing measures, staying home if you feel sick, frequent handwashing, and avoiding touching your face.

What is a cloth face covering?

A cloth face covering, or cloth mask may include either a sewn mask with straps that go around the head or behind the ears or a piece of fabric tied around a person's head.

What are some of the limitations of wearing cloth face coverings?

There is limited evidence to suggest that wearing cloth face coverings actually helps reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Unlike surgical N95 respirators, cloth masks have neither the particle filtration mechanism nor the airtight face seal design to filter at least 95 percent of infectious particles. Two studies found that cloth masks resulted in significantly higher rates of respiratory infection than surgical masks due to poor filtration and pathogen retention. According to one study, cloth masks filtered just 3 percent of particles, compared to surgical masks that filtered 56 percent.

While many of the countries that have succeeded in preventing widespread transmission have a more common practice of wearing face masks or other cloth face coverings while in public areas, it is important to observe that these same countries have implemented multi-pronged, more comprehensive public health responses to the COVID-19 outbreaks than the United States. The U.S. does not have the widespread testing and rigorous case contact tracing and isolation that has proven key to preventing outbreaks in other countries.

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How should I wear a cloth face covering?

You may choose to wear a face mask over your nose and mouth during essential public activities, such as shopping at the grocery store. Once you have put on the cloth face covering, do not touch or adjust it until you are taking it off.

How should I care for a cloth face covering?

Wash in hot water with detergent or bleach after every use, if possible. If you must take off and put back on the cloth face covering before you are able to wash it, make sure to wash your hands both before and after putting it back on.

Discard cloth face coverings that no longer cover the nose and mouth, have stretched out or damaged ties or straps, cannot stay on the face, or have holes or tears in the fabric.

Cloth face coverings should **not** be used in health care settings.

Cloth face coverings are not intended for use by nurses or other health care workers in hospitals or health care settings. Employers are legally and morally obligated to provide the personal protective equipment (PPE) and other precautions that nurses need to be safe at work. PPE for COVID-19 must include a minimum of an N95 respirator plus eye protection, preferably a powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR), gowns or coveralls, gloves, head and shoe coverings, and temporary scrubs. *For more information, please visit www.nationalnursesunited.org/covid-19.*

What RNs and health care workers need

Cloth face coverings will not provide the protection that we need to stop the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. We need »

- » Workplace protections for nurses and other health care workers, with the highest level of protection as determined by the precautionary principle.
- » Congress and the Trump Administration to invoke the Defense Production Act to mobilize a much broader and bigger manufacturing push to produce the N95s and other gear we need now and in the long term.
- » Widespread testing of both asymptomatic and symptomatic individuals to ensure prompt recognition and response to all possible COVID-19 infections.
- » Rigorous contact tracing to identify all people who may have been exposed to a confirmed case, ensuring that those individuals are isolated, and that further transmission is stopped.
- » Coverage of all treatment, care and services for people with potential COVID-19 infection who are uninsured or underinsured, including for insured patients who are denied coverage. This should include funding for widespread communication to the public that all testing, treatment, and other health care services related to COVID-19 will be paid for regardless of their insurance status.

Sources »

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