

## Masks and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

COVID-19 is an infectious disease that can be transmitted via respiratory droplets.

### Why Should I Consider Wearing a Face Mask?

Recent studies suggest that coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be transmitted by infected persons even in the absence of symptoms of disease. While social distancing and good hand hygiene are the most important methods to prevent virus transmission, new guidelines state that healthy individuals can consider wearing masks in public settings, particularly when physical distancing is difficult (like in grocery stores or pharmacies). Primary benefits of wearing a mask include limiting the spread of the virus from someone who knows or does not know they have an infection to others. Masks also remind others to continue practicing physical distancing. However, nonmedical masks may not be effective in preventing infection for the person wearing them. Masks should not be worn by children younger than 2 years or by individuals who are unable to remove the mask by themselves or are unconscious.

### What Kind of Face Mask Can I Wear?

Unless you are sick, a health care worker, or caring for someone who has COVID-19, medical masks (including surgical face masks and N95s) are not recommended. Because of shortages, medical masks should be prioritized for health care workers providing care for patients. Cloth face coverings can be made from household items such as 2 layers of cotton fabric, T-shirts, bandanas, or bedsheets. Masks should be secured with ear loops or ties. Whatever material a face mask is made from, it should fit well and cover the nose and mouth. The mask should not restrict the wearer's ability to breathe.

### How Do I Wear a Face Mask?

Before putting on a face mask, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol). Without touching the front of the mask, secure the ties behind your ears or head. While wearing the mask, do not touch the mask or your face. When removing the mask, take off the ear loops or ties first. Do not touch the front of the mask or your face when removing the mask. After removing the mask wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use hand sanitizer). Face masks should be washed routinely with soap and water or laundry detergent to prevent contamination. Wearing a mask in public should always be accompanied by remaining at least 6 feet away from others and practicing good hand hygiene.

### Wearing masks to limit the spread of COVID-19

Social distancing and good hand hygiene are the most important methods of preventing coronavirus transmission, but wearing masks in public can limit the spread of COVID-19 by people who have the virus.

Many types of masks can be made at home using fabric, T-shirts, or bandanas.



#### How to properly wear a mask

1 Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before putting on mask.

2 Secure mask ties behind your ears or head without touching your face.



Masks should fit well over your nose and mouth without restricting breathing.

3 Do not touch your face or front of mask while wearing.

4 When removing, release ear loops or ties without touching your face or mask.



5 Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after removing mask.

Masks should be washed routinely with soap and water or laundry detergent to prevent contamination.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html)

**Authors:** Angel N. Desai, MD, MPH; David M. Aronoff, MD

**Published Online:** April 17, 2020. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.6437

**Author Affiliations:** Fishbein Fellow, JAMA (Desai); Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, Tennessee (Aronoff).

**Conflict of Interest Disclosures:** Dr Aronoff reported receiving funding from the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, Pfizer, Cayman Chemical Co, March of Dimes, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and serving as an advisory board consultant for Summit Therapeutics, NAEJA-RGM Pharmaceuticals, BLC, and Sanofi Pasteur. Dr Desai reported no disclosures.

**Sources:** Omer SB, Malani P, Del Rio C. The COVID-19 pandemic in the US: a clinical update. *JAMA*. Published online April 6, 2020. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.5788

Bourouiba L. Turbulent gas clouds and respiratory pathogen emissions: potential implications for reducing transmission of COVID-19. *JAMA*. Published online March 26, 2020. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.4756

Bai Y, Yao L, Wei T, et al. Presumed asymptomatic carrier transmission of COVID-19. *JAMA*. 2020;323(14):1406-1407. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.2565

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of JAMA. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JAMA suggests that you consult your physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. To purchase bulk reprints, email [reprints@jamanetwork.com](mailto:reprints@jamanetwork.com).