Preventing COVID-19: Masks

KEY POINTS

- As physical distancing requirements and capacity limits have been lifted, the risk of COVID-19 is still present, especially for those who are not fully vaccinated against the virus. If you aren't fully vaccinated, your mask is one of the most powerful tools you have to protect yourself, as well as other unvaccinated people, when in public. This is especially true when you are in an indoor or crowded outdoor space.
- There are places where everyone 2 years of age and older must* continue to wear a mask, whether or not they are fully vaccinated. Details of when masks must be worn are below.
- To be extra safe, it is strongly recommended that you wear masks indoors in public places when you don't know everyone's vaccination status regardless of your vaccination status. While fully vaccinated people are protected from getting sick from variants, they may get asymptomatic or mild infections. Until we better understand how and to who the Delta variant is spreading, everyone is asked to wear masks to help slow the spread of the virus.
- For masks to work properly, they need to completely cover your nose and mouth and fit snugly against the sides of your face and around your nose. Your mask should be made with two or more layers of tightly woven, breathable material. Details, including information on double masking, are below.

* Infants and children under 2 years of age should not wear a mask. Children ages 2 to 8 should wear a mask only when under adult supervision. See Who should not wear a mask and Special considerations for persons with communication difficulties or certain disabilities for other exceptions.

HOW WEARING A MASK CAN SLOW THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

COVID-19 spreads when an infected person breathes out droplets and very small particles that contain the virus. These droplets and particles can then be breathed in by other people or land on their eyes, noses, or mouth.

- *Protect others*: wearing a mask over your mouth and nose lowers the number of respiratory droplets and particles that you release into the air when you breathe or talk.
- *Protect yourself*: wearing a mask over your mouth and nose also lowers the number of respiratory droplets and particles from someone else that get into your nose, mouth, and lungs.

WHEN YOU DO AND DON'T NEED TO WEAR A MASK

There are places where everyone 2 years of age and older must* continue to wear a mask, regardless of their vaccination status.

Note that in the workplace, workers have to follow Cal/OSHA mask requirements which are different than the guidance below.

Recommendations:
- If you are in a setting where you are in close contact with other people who may not be fully vaccinated, consider wearing a higher level of protection, such as wearing two masks ("double masking") or a respirator (e.g., KN95 or N95). This is especially important if you are not fully vaccinated and are in an indoor or crowded outdoor setting.
- To be extra safe, it is strongly recommended that you wear masks indoors in public places when you don't know everyone's vaccination status regardless of your vaccination status. While fully vaccinated people are

protected from getting sick from variants, they may get asymptomatic or mild infections. Until we better understand how and to who the Delta variant is spreading, everyone is asked to wear masks to help slow the spread of the virus.

EVERYONE, regardless of vaccination status, must wear a mask:

- On planes, trains, buses, ferries, taxis and ride-shares, and all other forms of public transport
- In transportation hubs like airports, bus terminals, train stations, marinas, seaports or other ports, subway stations, or any other area that provides transportation.
- Healthcare settings
- State and local correctional facilities and detention centers
- Shelters and cooling centers
- Indoors at any youth-serving facility (such as K-12 schools, childcare, day camps, etc.)
- Any business or government office serving the public that requires everyone to wear a mask

UNVACCINATED people must also wear a mask:

In indoor public settings and businesses, for example:
- Movie theaters
- Restaurants
- Retail spaces
- Family entertainment centers
- Mega-events
- Meetings
- Government offices serving the public

In addition, FULLY VACCINATED people are strongly encouraged to wear a mask in the indoor public settings and businesses above.

You can always choose to wear a mask if you want to, regardless of your vaccination status. And you cannot be turned away from a business or activity for wearing one.

*There are some people who should not wear a mask due to their young age, medical condition, disability, or for other reasons. See Who should not wear a mask and Special considerations for persons with communication difficulties or certain disabilities.

Note: You are allowed to take off your mask while doing certain activities such as when you are actively eating, drinking, or swimming.

WHAT KIND OF MASK SHOULD I WEAR?

There are many types of masks you can use to protect against getting and spreading COVID-19. Choose a mask:

1. That fits snugly against your nose and chin with no large gaps around the sides of the face, AND
2. That has two or more layers, AND
3. That you will be comfortable wearing.

Recommended types of masks for the general public:

Cloth masks

- Are washable and re-usable.
- They should have two or three layers of washable tightly woven, breathable fabric or two layers with a pocket for a filter.
- To see if the fabric is tightly woven, see if it blocks light when it is held up to a bright light source.
    o For extra protection, a cloth mask can be worn OVER a disposable mask (see *Double masking)*.

Disposable masks

Also called medical procedure or surgical masks.

- Look for a description that it has multiple layers of non-woven material and a nose wire.
- Should be thrown away once they become wet/or dirty or after a day of use, whichever comes first.
    o For extra protection, a disposable mask can be worn UNDER a cloth mask (see *Double masking)*.

KN95 Masks (also known as KN95 respirators)

These are a type of disposable respirator that are commonly made and used in China. They are similar to N95 masks that are used by healthcare professionals in the United States.

- Look for KN95 masks that meet requirements similar to those set by CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) for respirators. See the CDC webpage Factors to Consider When Planning to Purchase Respirators from Another Country.
- Beware of counterfeit (fake) KN95 masks (about 60% of KN95 masks in the US are fake).
    o Do not wear other masks with an KN95 mask.
- KN95 masks are designed for one-time use. They should be thrown away once they become wet/or dirty or after a day of use, whichever comes first.

See CDC Types of Masks section "Masks that Meet a Standard" and an FDA list of Authorized Imported, Non-NIOSH Approved Respirators Manufactured in China.

Do not use masks that:

- Are made of loosely woven fabrics.
- Are made of a fabric that is hard to breathe through such as vinyl, leather, or plastic.
- Have valves, vents, or holes

Bandanas and scarves are not recommended (unless you wear a mask underneath).

See CDC Types of Masks for more information.

TIPS! It is recommended to have more than one mask readily available so that a dirty face covering can be easily replaced with a clean one. When you are out, carry a spare mask and hand sanitizer. If your mask gets damp or wet, replace it with a clean dry one.

HOW TO WEAR A MASK PROPERLY

To get the best protection from your mask, make sure that it fits well. It is important that whichever type of mask you use:

- It completely covers your nose and mouth.
- It fits snugly against the nose, sides of your face and chin and doesn't leave a gap.

COVID-19 Masks

Ways to make your cloth or disposable mask fit better
- For children, use a smaller mask that fits them well.
- Wear a mask with nose wires. This is especially helpful if you wear glasses.
- Knot the ear loops close to the edge of the mask and tuck the excess material so there is no gap. See video in this section of the ph.lacounty.gov/masks webpage.
- Use a mask fitter or brace — these devices are worn over a cloth or disposable mask to reduce the leakage around the edges.

Tips to check that your mask fits
- Check for gaps by cupping your hands around the outside edges of the mask and feel for any air leakages. Make sure no air is flowing from the area near your eyes or from the sides of the mask.
- If the mask has a good fit, you will feel warm air come through the front of the mask and may be able to see the mask material move in and out with each breath.
- Make sure you can still breathe comfortably and that your vision is not obstructed.
- If you have to continually adjust your mask, it might not fit properly. Consider trying different types or sizes of masks.

Wearing two masks or "double masking"
"Double masking" is when a cloth mask worn on top of a disposable mask. This makes the disposable mask fit better and adds extra layer(s) of protection.

Important note:
- Double masking does not work with two disposable masks because they are too loose.
- Respirators (e.g., N95 masks or KN95 masks), should not be worn with a second mask.
- If you try double masking or other ways to improve the fit of your mask, make sure you can still breathe comfortably, and your vision is not obstructed. Test it out at home first.
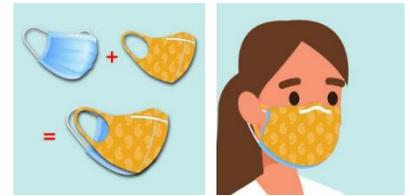
See CDC Improve the Fit and Filtration of Your Mask to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19 for more information.

HOW TO PUT A MASK ON AND TAKE IT OFF

How to put on a mask
- Clean your hands before putting the mask on.
- Make sure that it fits correctly (see above).
- Make sure you can breathe comfortably.
- Once you have been wearing the mask around others, try to avoid touching the mask. If you touch any part of the mask other than the ear loops/ties, you should clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer.

How to take off a mask
- Remove the mask by handling the ear loops or ties. Do not touch the outside of the mask. It is considered contaminated until you wash it.
  - *For masks with ear loops*: Hold both of the ear loops and lift and remove the mask.
  - *For masks with ties*: Untie the bottom string first, then untie the top string and pull the mask away from you.
- Cloth mask - put in a bag or bin for laundering.
- Disposable mask or respirator (e.g., N95 or KN95) - throw away once it gets wet or visibly dirty or after a day of wearing it (whichever comes first).

- Clean your hands.

Removing your mask temporarily (e.g., to eat or drink)
- Remove your mask (as above).
- Fold it in half so the outside corners touch.
- Put it in a clean, dry bag.
- When you put it back on, follow the instructions above and make sure that the same side is facing out.
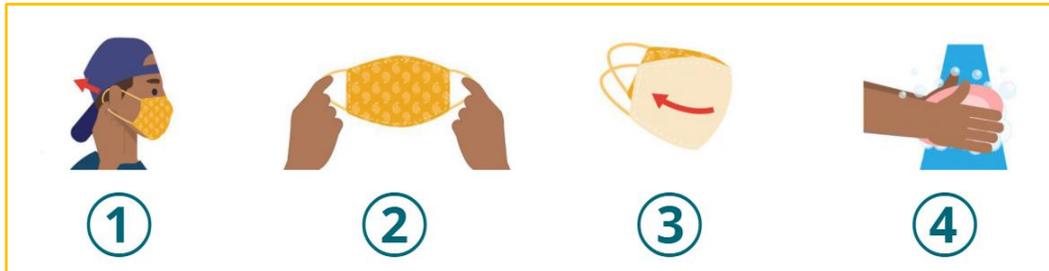
LOOKING AFTER YOUR MASK

Cloth masks
- Place a wet or visibly dirty cloth mask in a sealed plastic bag until you can wash it. Wash it as soon as possible to prevent mold or mildew.
- Place dry cloth face masks in a bag or bin until they can be washed.
- Wash your mask after each use.
  - Wash according to the fabric label. You can wash your masks in a washer with your regular laundry using regular laundry detergent.
  - If washing by hand, wash with warm tap water and laundry detergent or soap. Rinse with water.
- Dry your face mask **completely** either in a dryer or by air drying.

Disposable masks and respirators (e.g. N95 and KN95 masks)
Throw the mask away once it gets wet or visibly dirty or after a day of wearing it (whichever comes first).

WHO SHOULD NOT WEAR A MASK

The following people should not wear a mask:
- **Children under age 2**. Most children ages 2 to 8 can safely wear a mask with adult supervision.
- **People who are cannot safely wear a mask**, such as someone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or who is unable to remove a mask without help.
- **Workers in situations where a mask would create a risk to workplace health, safety, or job duty** as determined by a workplace risk assessment (see osha.gov/safety-management).
- **Anyone instructed not to wear a mask by their medical provider.** If their job involves regular contact with others, they must wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape that is form fitting under the chin (see Face Shields), as long as their medical condition permits it.

Note: Underlying medical conditions
Most people with underlying medical conditions, including those with asthma can and should wear a mask, unless instructed not to by their doctor. Wearing a mask does not reduce a person's oxygen supply or cause a build-up of carbon dioxide. If you or someone you care for has an underlying health condition and you have concerns about wearing a mask, talk to your doctor. They will discuss the benefits and potential risks with you.

COVID-19 Masks

Clear masks or cloth masks with a clear plastic panel are an alternative type of mask for people who interact with:

- People who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Children or students learning to read.
- People learning a new language.
- People with disabilities. These masks make communication easier. They can be homemade, or store bought. Follow the information in How to wear a mask properly to make sure that they fit well.

Appropriate and consistent use of masks may be challenging for some children and for people of any age with certain disabilities, including cognitive, intellectual, developmental, sensory, and behavioral disorders. If you are caring for children and people with certain disabilities, ask their doctor for advice about wearing a mask.

FACE SHIELDS

A face shield is a transparent barrier that covers the face and is typically open at the sides and bottom. Face shields are often worn by healthcare workers in addition to medical masks, to protect their eyes from splashes and sprays of body fluids.

A face shield alone cannot be used in place of a mask.

Face shields with a drape
Although they may not work as well as masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19, a face shield with a drape attached on the bottom edge that is either form fitting under the chin or tucked into a shirt or collar can be used by people who cannot wear a mask due to a disability or medical condition. For more information on face shields plus drape including a photograph see the CDPH Face Shield Frequently Asked Questions.

Do NOT put a plastic face shield on newborns or infants.

MORE INFORMATION

From the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

- Your Guide to Masks
- Types of Masks
- Improve the Fit and Filtration of Your Mask to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19
- Considerations for Wearing Masks