



# Preventing COVID-19: Masks

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## KEY POINTS

- You should wear a mask when you are in a public setting and when you are around people who don't live in your household\*.
- Wearing a mask protects others as well as you. Masks work best when everyone wears them consistently and correctly.
- To get the best protection, use a mask made with two or more layers of tightly woven, breathable material.
- Make sure your mask completely covers your nose and mouth and fits snugly against the sides of your face and around your nose.
- Be sure to clean your hands after touching or removing your mask.
- Continue to use other measures to prevent COVID-19 being spread such as staying home when sick, avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces, staying at least 6 feet away from others, avoiding people who are sick, and washing your hands often. Get a COVID-19 vaccine when you can.

*\*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 with adult supervision.*

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

When you wear a mask, you protect others as well as yourself. Masks work best when everyone wears one.

COVID-19 virus spreads mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets over short distances. This is known as droplet transmission. Respiratory droplets are released into the air when people breathe, speak, sing, cough, shout, or sneeze. It is thought that most infections are spread through large respiratory droplets that travel less than 6 feet before falling out of the air. These droplets can infect other people if they are breathed in or land in the mouths or noses of others who are nearby. People who are close to a person with COVID-19 are at greatest risk of infection.



Under certain conditions, the virus may be spread through smaller respiratory droplets or particles that can remain suspended in the air and travel a longer distance to infect people who are further away or who entered an enclosed space after the infected person left. This is known as airborne transmission. Conditions that make airborne transmission more likely include being in an enclosed space or a space with poor ventilation, especially when people are singing, shouting, or breathing heavily (like with exercise). These conditions can allow for the build-up of smaller droplets or particles in the space that can remain in the air over longer distances (usually more than 6 feet) and for a longer time (minutes to hours). See [How COVID-19 spreads](#) to learn more.

- Protecting others: wearing a mask reduces the number of respiratory droplets that you release into the air.
- Protecting yourself: wearing a mask also reduces the number of respiratory droplets from someone else that get into your nose, mouth, and lungs.

**Everyone needs to wear a mask even when they feel well. This is because people with COVID-19 can spread the virus to others before they get symptoms or without ever getting symptoms.**

For masks to work best, everyone should be wearing them:

- Consistently (whenever they are around people they don't live with) **and**
- Correctly (covering BOTH their mouth and nose).

## COVID-19 Masks

Studies have shown that in communities where people wear masks there is less transmission of COVID-19. See CDC [Scientific Brief: Community Use of Cloth Masks to control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2](#) for more information.

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

#### You DO need to wear a mask:\*

- When you are in a public or private space with people that don't live with you, whether inside or outside. This means whenever you leave your home and may walk near or past others.
- When you use any form of public transportation. This includes when traveling into, within, or outside of the United States and in transportation hubs such as airports and bus stations.
- If you have COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 or if you are in quarantine and you must be around others in your own home.
- If you are caring for someone who has COVID-19.
- If someone in your household has COVID-19.
- In specific places and situations described in various [guidance documents](#) on the public health webpage and in the [Safer at Home Health Officer Order](#).

\*See [Who should not wear a mask](#) and [Special considerations for persons with communication difficulties or certain disabilities](#).

#### You DON'T need to wear a mask:

- When you are driving alone or only with members of your household.
- When you are working alone in a private office with doors closed (note: persons working in cubicles, even with full partitions, must wear a mask).
- When you are actively eating or drinking (as long as you are at least 6 feet away from people who don't live with you).
- When you are doing activities that may get your mask wet, such as swimming. Wet masks can make it hard to breathe and do not work as well.
- When you are exercising outside and at a distance from others (8 feet or greater). Be sure to have a mask with you in case you cannot keep a safe distance from others.
- When you are wearing an alternate form of required respiratory protection for work.

### 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.
  - For extra protection, a cloth mask can be worn OVER a disposable mask (see [Double masking](#)).

## COVID-19 Masks

### Disposable masks

Also called medical procedure or surgical masks.

- Should be made of multi-layered, non-woven material.
- Should be thrown away once they become wet/or dirty or after a day of use, whichever comes first.
  - For extra protection, a disposable mask can be worn UNDER a cloth mask (see [Double masking](#)).



### KN95 Masks

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).
  - 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.



### 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
- Are NIOSH-approved N95 respirators unless you are in a setting that requires these. NIOSH-approved N95 respirators are critical supplies that are meant for healthcare workers and first responders.

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.

### 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](https://ph.lacounty.gov/masks) webpage.



## COVID-19 Masks

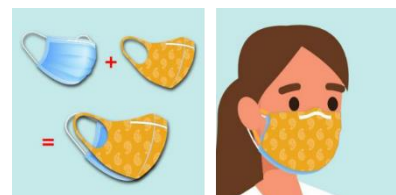
- Use a mask fitter or brace—these devices are worn over a cloth or disposable mask to reduce the leakage around the edges.

### 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.
- KN95 masks, (or N95 masks for healthcare workers), 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.

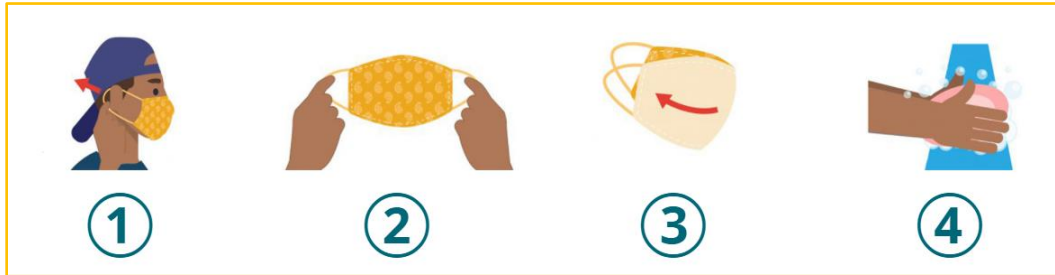
### How to take off a mask

- 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 KN95 - throw away once it gets wet or visibly dirty or after a day of wearing it (whichever comes first).
- Clean your hands.

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### 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 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 duties** as determined by a [workplace risk assessment](#) (see [osha.gov/safety-management](https://www.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

### SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERSONS WITH COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES OR CERTAIN DISABILITIES

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. In LA County, you may see face shields worn with a mask to protect some workers who may come into close contact with customers.

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

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.

### WHAT TO DO IF OTHERS ARE NOT WEARING A MASK

If you are in public and encounter someone not wearing a mask or wearing it incorrectly, consider the tips below:

- Be aware that some people are not able to wear a mask.
- Be prepared to leave if you find yourself in a situation where people are not wearing masks.
- If you can, keep extra physical distance between you and people not wearing a mask or wearing it incorrectly.
- If you are in a store or other place of business, ask the manager to speak to the person not wearing a mask.
- Take caution before asking a stranger to use a mask as this may lead to a difficult situation. If you chose to do this, be prepared for possible confrontation. You could consider saying something like, "Masks protect both of us and I would feel much more comfortable if we were both wearing one."

### 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](#)