



# Preventing COVID-19: Masks

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**Note:** Masks are strongly recommended in most indoor public places in Los Angeles County. Masks are still required in high-risk settings. See [Mask Wearing Rules and Recommendations](#) to see the rules for LA County.

## KEY POINTS

- Masks are strongly recommended in most indoor public places for everyone 2 years of age and older. . There are some settings where everyone must wear a mask regardless of vaccination status. See [Mask Wearing Rules and Recommendations](#).
- In order to work well, a mask needs to have both a **good fit** and **good filtration**. A good fit means that the mask covers your mouth and nose and fits snugly against the sides of your face and your nose. Good filtration means the material that the mask is made of blocks the virus well. You can get good filtration by wearing a mask with several layers and made of certain materials.
- While all masks provide some level of protection, well-fitting respirators (e.g., N95 and KN95) provide the best protection. Wearing a highly protective mask is important for high-risk situations and for people at [increased risk for severe disease](#).

*\*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.

- **Masks** protect others by containing the droplets and particles you breathe, cough, or sneeze out. And, if the mask fits closely to your face and filters well, it protects you from particles spread by others.
- **Respirators** filter very well and fit closely to your face, so they protect you from particles spread by others. They also protect others by containing droplets and particles that you breathe, cough, or sneeze out.



## WHAT KIND OF MASK SHOULD I WEAR?

### Know which Masks Provide the Best Protection Against COVID-19

Poor	Good	Better	Best
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any cloth mask without a filter or layer of synthetic non-woven material</li> <li>• Bandanas</li> <li>• Gaiters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cloth mask made of multiple layers that include a layer or filter made of synthetic non-woven material (such as melt-blown polypropylene) that fits well.</li> <li>• Medical mask-not fitted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double mask (medical mask + cloth mask)</li> <li>• Medical mask – fitted with a brace or the knot &amp; tuck technique</li> </ul>	Well-fitting respirators such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N95</li> <li>• KN95</li> <li>• KF94</li> </ul>



## COVID-19 Masks

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 or your nose, AND
2. [Filters well](#), AND
3. That you will be comfortable wearing.

If you will be in a place where COVID-19 [spreads more easily](#) you should wear your most protective mask, especially if you are at high risk of getting sick from COVID-19.

Examples of more protective masks include:

- Well-fitting [respirators](#) (such as an N95, KN95, or KF94).
- [Double masks](#) – wearing a snug cloth mask over a medical mask. This improves how well your mask fits and filters.
- Fitted [medical masks](#) – fitted with either the [knot and tuck technique](#) or using a mask brace.



Note: You can get good filtration from high-quality cloth masks made of multiple layers that include a layer or filter made of synthetic non-woven material (such as melt-blown polypropylene). Disposable respirators such as N95s and medical masks are made of multiple layers of this kind of material.

See CDC's [Types of Masks and Respirators — Choosing a Mask or Respirator for Different Situations](#) and CDPH's [Get the Most Out of Masking](#) and [Masks for Kids: Tips and Resources](#) pages.

## TYPES OF MASKS

### Cloth masks

Cloth masks (also called reusable masks) work well if they are tight fitting and made of materials that filter out small particles. For extra protection, wear a cloth mask OVER a medical mask (see [Double masking](#)).



- Good cloth masks have:
  - At least three layers. Two layers of tightly woven fabric with a third layer of non-woven fabric. The third layer could be a mask filter insert or a synthetic fabric such as melt-blown polypropylene.
  - Nose wires to reduce gaps from the nose.
  - Adjustable ear loops or straps that go around the head to reduce gaps from the face.
- Cloth masks without these features should not be used in higher risk situations if other options are available. Examples of less effective face coverings are two-layer cotton masks, bandanas, and gaiters.
- Cloth masks are washable and re-usable. Be sure to read the mask's care instructions. Some cloth masks become less effective if machine washed or dried.

Note: Some cloth ("reusable") masks are designed and tested to demonstrate that they perform at a consistent level. The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) has set a standard (ASTM F3502) for barrier face coverings, including cloth ("reusable") masks. Masks rated as ASTM F3502-Level 2 for particle filtration provide better protection than Level 1. The most protective masks have a particle filtration efficiency of at least 95%. If you are considering purchasing a cloth mask that is not ASTM rated, look for one that has been tested by an accredited third-party laboratory. Ratings for some commercially available face masks are published on the CDC website [Barrier Face Coverings and Workplace Performance/Performance Plus Masks](#).

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### Medical masks

Also called surgical, medical procedure, disposable masks, or dental masks. These include various types of loose-fitting disposable masks.



- Look for a mask that has a nose wire and at least three layers of non-woven or spun bound fabric and melt-blown fabric, which are often made of polypropylene.
- Improve the fit of the mask by either knotting its ear loops and tucking in its sides (see [video](#)) or by using a mask brace.
- Improve both the fit AND filtration of the mask by wearing it UNDER a cloth mask (see [Double masking](#)).
- Medical masks should be resistant to fluids.
  - Tip: Test you mask with a drop of water on the front. The water should not soak into the mask. It should form beads on the surface.
- Follow the manufacturer’s instructions on how to wear, store, and clean or properly dispose of the mask. Do not wear a mask if it is wet or dirty.

Some disposable masks are designed and tested to demonstrate that they perform to certain standards. These include the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) standards F2100 or F3502. The most protective masks have a particle filtration efficiency of at least 95%. Look for masks that have been tested by an accredited third-party laboratory.

### Respirators (such as N95, KN95, and KF94)

Respirators are specialized masks that are designed to filter out very small particles. There are many types of respirators. N95 and KN95 respirators are disposable respirators that are designed to filter at least 95% of airborne particles. KF94s are made to filter at least 94%.



- **N95 Respirators** are regulated by both the FDA (if marketed for medical purposes) and the CDC’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Cal/OSHA requires that healthcare workers who wear N95s are ‘[fit tested](#)’ to find the right model, style, and size of N95. See [FDA N95 Respirators](#) for more information.
- **KN95 Respirators** are similar to N95s but are made to meet Chinese standards. KN95s are not regulated by NIOSH. These masks almost always have ear loops and look like a duck bill. Be aware that about 60% of KN95s sold in the US are fake. If you choose to use a KN95, it is recommended to find one that has been [assessed by the National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory](#) and found to have a minimum "filtration efficiency" of 95% or higher.
- **KF94 Respirators** are made to meet South Korean standards and are not regulated by NIOSH. They have side flaps and are a more rectangular horizontal “boat” shape compared to N95s/KN95s. They often have ear loops. They fit a wider range of face shapes and sizes.

**Respirators that fit well and provide a tight seal on your face protect you better than a cloth mask on its own or a medical mask.** They may be less comfortable because they filter better and fit more tightly.

- When choosing a respirator, look at how well it fits and read the manufacturer instructions. These instructions should include information on how to wear, store, and clean or properly dispose of the respirator.
- To work well, respirators need to make a tight seal on your face. Find the right size, style, and model.
  - Respirators with straps that go around the back of the head provide a better seal than those with ear loops.
  - Respirators may not fit as well if you have facial hair.
  - Both KN95 and KF94s are both available in "child" or "extra-small" sizes, making them a good option for children.
  - Different styles and sizes of respirators suit different people. You may need to try several kinds until you find one that provides a tight seal that you are comfortable wearing and don’t feel the need to constantly touch and adjust.

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- Check the seal each time you put one on. See [NIOSH instructions](#) for how to put on, take off and check the seal of a respirator.
- If you have breathing difficulties check with your doctor before wearing a respirator.
- Do not wear an N95/KN95 with another mask (i.e., do not double mask).
- Beware of [counterfeit \(fake\) respirators](#) as they may not be able to provide the promised protection. Genuine respirators have certain markings printed on them - see appropriate [N95 markings](#) and [KN95 markings](#).
  - NIOSH tips for [warning signs of websites selling fake products](#) and [fake standard or approval markings](#) (includes useful photos).
  - CDC [Factors to Consider When Planning to Purchase Respirators from Another Country](#).

For more detailed information, see CDC [Respirators](#).

## HOW TO IMPROVE THE FIT AND FILTRATION OF YOUR MASK

- For children, use a smaller mask that fits them well.
- Wear a mask with nose wires.
- Use a mask fitter or brace—these devices are worn over a cloth or surgical mask to reduce the leakage around the edges.
- Knot the ear loops close to the edge of the mask and tuck the excess material so there is no gap. See [Knot and Tuck video](#).

Certain types of facial hair, like beards, can make mask fitting difficult. People with beards can trim them, use a mask fitter/brace or double mask.



### Tips to check that your mask fits

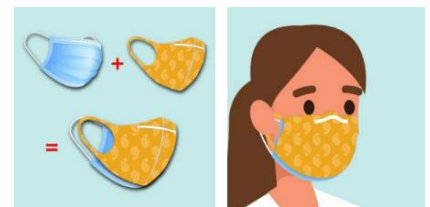
- Check for gaps by cupping your hands around the outside edges of the mask and feel for any air leakages. Make sure no air is flowing from the area near your eyes or from the sides of the mask.
- If the mask has a good fit, you will feel warm air come through the front of the mask and may be able to 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 well-fitting cloth mask is worn on top of a medical mask. This makes the medical mask fit better and adds extra layer(s) of protection.

#### Important note:

- Double masking does not work with two medical masks because they are too loose.
- Respirators should not be worn with a second mask, as this interferes with the fit.
- 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 How Your Mask Protects You](#) and [Maximizing Fit for Cloth and Medical Procedure Masks to Improve Performance and Reduce SARS-CoV-2 Transmission and Exposure, 2021](#).

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### 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.
- 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.



**TIP!** It is recommended to have more than one mask readily available so that a dirty or wet mask 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.

### 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](#).
- **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

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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.

### 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. [Studies](#) show that most children, including those with autism spectrum disorders, can learn to wear a mask with positive reinforcement and coaching. 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 drapes

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

CDPH: [Get the Most Out of Masking](#)

Centers for Disease Control (CDC): [Types of Masks and Respirators](#)