



Mask Guide

Anyone over the age of 2 years should wear a face mask or face covering in public. Social distancing (staying at least 6 feet apart) should also be practiced whenever possible, in addition to wearing a mask or face covering. Wearing a face covering may help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. There are many different types of masks and each are designed and may be worn for different purposes.

Cloth Face mask – The general public is encouraged to use a homemade face mask. Surgical masks and N95 respirators are in critical demand, and the CDC asks that citizens reserve them for use by healthcare workers and other medical first responders. These are medical devices for use in settings where direct care is being given to patients with COVID-19. A simple cloth face covering can slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. Cloth face coverings fashioned from household items can be made at home from common materials at low cost as an effective public health measure. Cloth face coverings should be washed before being worn again.





Surgical Face Mask – surgical (medical) face masks are intended to be worn by healthcare professionals during surgery to catch the bacteria shed in liquid droplets and aerosols from the wearer's mouth and nose. These are considered medical devices, but similar masks for use by the general public are also available. These are not respirators and do not protect the wearer from breathing in small particles, gases, or chemicals in the air. They help prevent the wearer from spreading respiratory droplets and act as a protective barrier to prevent splashes, sprays, large droplets, or splatter from entering the wearer's mouth and nose. The protective quality of disposable facemasks varies depending on type of material used to make the facemask, but they are used to prevent most respiratory droplets from getting to the mouth and nose.

N95 mask – N95 masks are respirators that reduces wearer's exposure to particles, including small particle aerosols and large droplets (only non-oil aerosols). N95 respirators must meet standards of the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). They must filter out at least 95% of airborne particles, including large and small particles. N95 masks should be used if there is a potential for secretions in fine aerosols.

N95 masks are respirators that require medical clearance, training, and fit testing to be worn properly and work effectively. They should not be used by untrained individuals or the general public.

KN95 mask – KN95 respirators have not been approved by NIOSH, but they can provide greater protection than a surgical or cloth mask when they fit snugly. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized NIOSH non-approved KN95 respirators from certain manufacturers to be used when N95 respirators are in short supply or unavailable. When used as medical devices in place of N95 respirators they must be used with the same requirements that apply to N95 respirators.

The face coverings recommended for the general public are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are crucial supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders to care for the most critically ill. Health care workers and first responders cannot keep distance from others, avoid sick people, or avoid contact with others' bodily fluid, such as respiratory secretion and saliva, so it is essential that we reserve masks for them. These medical devices are not necessary to provide protection to the general public under ordinary circumstances and activities, as cloth face coverings and other non-medical masks can slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others, as well as act as a protective barrier to prevent droplets from entering the wearer's mouth and nose.

TYPE OF WORK/TASK/ACTIVITY	CLOTH FACE MASK/COVERING	SURGICAL MASK (FACE MASK)	KN95 RESPIRATOR	N95 RESPIRATOR
				
General activities in public – shopping, walking in the park, etc.	X	X		
Interaction with coworkers in an office workplace	X	X		
Short frequent contact with general public (reception desk/intake staff)	X	X	X	
Short close contact (consultation with client in office)	X	X	X	
Longer close contact with client (home visit/inspection)	X	X	X	
Longer/closer contact (personal care services)		X	X	
Law enforcement, minimal contact	X	X	X	
Law enforcement, close contact (physical confrontation, arrest)	X	X	X*	X*
Emergency shelter staff (support for confirmed/suspected COVID-19 patients)		X		X
Aerosol generating procedures on patients (COVID-19 symptomatic or unknown status) AND eye protection (face shield or safety goggles)				X

* Note that N95 and KN95 respirators may restrict breathing which may pose a problem during strenuous physical activity.