

ACFASP Advisory Mask Use for Influenza



Overall Recommendation including any Standard, Guideline or Option:

There is insufficient published evidence to determine if members of the public should wear face masks during influenza pandemics.

Standards: None.

Guidelines: Individuals in non-healthcare settings with influenza symptoms during an influenza pandemic should wear a surgical or procedure mask while in situations that puts them within 1 meter of other individuals. Surgical or procedure masks should also be worn by people caring for individuals with influenza symptoms during a pandemic. (Class III)

Options: Asymptomatic individuals, including individuals at high-risk for complications, may consider wearing a surgical or procedure mask in public settings (Class IV).

Questions to be addressed:

Should members of the public wear face masks during influenza pandemics to reduce viral transmission?

Introduction/Overview:

Flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Every year in the United States, on average:

- 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu;
- more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and;
- about 36,000 people die from flu.

Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. *Pandemic flu* is virulent human flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness. Because there is little natural immunity, the disease can spread easily from person-to-person. It spreads primarily via virus-laden large droplets (particles $>5\ \mu\text{m}$ in diameter) that are generated when infected persons cough or sneeze. These large droplets can then be directly deposited onto the mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tract of susceptible persons who are near (i.e., within 3 feet) the droplet source. Transmission also may occur through direct and indirect contact with infectious respiratory secretions. The use of surgical or procedure masks by infectious patients may help contain their respiratory secretions and limit exposure to others.

Summary of Scientific Foundation:

Unfortunately, there is no strong scientific evidence to support the use of face masks by the public during influenza pandemics. Most of the statements in the published literature come from expert consensus.