

INFECTION PREVENTION GUIDE FOR FACE COVERINGS

During COVID-19



Overview

- **Face coverings protect you.** Research shows that face coverings protect wearers by reducing the amount of virus that is inhaled during an exposure, which contributes to the severity of illness ([CID](#), [LA Times](#)).
- **Face coverings protect others.** They trap potentially infectious droplets expelled when the wearer talks, laughs, sings, yells, sneezes, or coughs ([CDC](#)).
- There are a variety of masks and face coverings: some offer higher levels of protection, some are easier to wear. Wear the most protective mask that you can that fits well and can be worn consistently.

During this current surge of the Omicron variant, in areas of medium - high community transmission of COVID-19, CDC recommends all persons over the age of 2 resume wearing masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status, to help limit infection.

- Even if a person is [up-to-date](#) in their COVID-19 vaccinations, [CDC recommends](#) face coverings as a part of a layered strategy of prevention against COVID-19, especially as the Omicron variants spread.

Essentials

The degree to which a mask is protective is called its fitted filtration efficiency (FFE), which is determined by the level of filtration of the material and the quality of the fit.

CHOOSE:

- **COMFORT.** Any face covering is better than no face covering. Choose a mask that you will wear. If choosing for a child, make sure it is the correct size and that they breathe easily and feel comfortable in it. Consider face size, head circumference, facial hair, comfort around ears.
- **FIT.** A face covering should fit tightly without gaps and stay over your nose and mouth when talking. Gaps are most common around the cheeks and the side of the nose. Choose a face covering with a bendable nose bridge. If you have facial hair, a mask fitter, brace, or double-masking (a disposable mask worn under a cloth mask) can help the mask fit more snugly.
- **FILTRATION.** Certain materials, such as the polypropylene used in surgical masks and HEPA filters, is designed to remove small particles. This material improves the filtration of a mask.

DO NOT CHOOSE:

- Masks with exhalation valves, which expel the wearer's exhalations into the surrounding air.
- Fabric masks that are made of thin material or material with holes (e.g. lace, chiffon, mesh).
- Masks and face coverings that make it hard to breathe (e.g., vinyl).
- Masks that are specially labeled as "surgical N95 respirators." These should be prioritized for healthcare personnel.

According to CDC, an uninfected person with no face covering can be infected if within 6 feet of an infected person for 15 minutes. The time increases to 27 minutes if both are wearing a cloth FC, and to 2,500 hours if both are wearing a fit-tested N95 FFR. The table below indicates time to infection for other combinations.

Time to Infectious Dose for Someone Not Infected with COVID-19

		RECEIVER IS WEARING				
		Nothing	Cloth FC	Surgical Mask	N95 FFR (10%)	N95 FFR (1%)
SOURCE IS WEARING	Nothing	15 MIN	20 MIN	30 MIN	2.5 HR	25 HR
	Cloth FC	20 MIN	27 MIN	40 MIN	3.3 HR	33 HR
	Surgical Mask	30 MIN	40 MIN	60 MIN	5 HR	50 HR
	N95 FFR (10%)	2.5 HR	3.3 HR	5 HR	25 HR	250 HR
	N95 FFR (1%)	25 HR	33 HR	50 HR	250 HR	2,500 HR

Inward leakage = Percentage of particles entering the facepiece to be inhaled by a receiver

Outward leakage = Percentage of particles exhaled by a source exiting the facepiece



WARNING: If respirators are required for other workplace hazards, do not stop their use. Treat COVID-19 as a new hazard that may require additional protection.

For more fact sheets and resources, use this QR code to access the ACGIH website:



Created by the Pandemic Response Task Force.



**This table was developed before Omicron and its variant emerged; these numbers likely have changed slightly, though the principles remain the same.*

GOOD



- Any cloth or surgical mask is better than no mask.
- Choose one that is the proper size, is comfortable to wear, fits without gaps, and has a bendable nose bridge.
- Many masks include pockets for filter inserts. A high-quality filter can be effective if it spans the mask. Filters that are smaller than the mask are less effective because the air will flow around them instead of through them.

BETTER



- A surgical mask is a good filter, but it needs to fit properly. This can be improved with a tight-fitting cloth mask over a surgical mask or by use of a mask fitter.
- [ASTM](#) standards are used to certify the production and testing of protective equipment, including surgical masks. Look for ASTM certification.

BEST



- If being worn by a child, purchase the KN95s and KN94s in children's sizes.
- There are counterfeit KN95s and KN94s. Look for clues before purchasing.
- The new classification [ASTM F3502 Barrier Face Covering](#), developed with NIOSH, was created specifically to protect against COVID-19.

SUPPLEMENTAL



FACE SHIELD:
ADDED BARRIER PROTECTION FOR THE EYES, FACE, AND FACE COVERING