



Limiting Transmission of COVID-19 Using Cloth Masks

On Saturday, April 4, 2020, the CDC recommended the wearing of cloth face coverings (masks) in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) ([Click Here](#)). Cloth masks are being recommended as an additional means of practicing and encouraging proper *respiratory etiquette*. Cloth masks are to be worn in addition to, not in place of, existing counter-measures such as hand washing and social distancing.

What is respiratory etiquette? Respiratory etiquette is the practice of implementing measures, including physical barriers, to prevent transmission of respiratory illnesses. Examples of respiratory etiquette include, but are not limited to, covering your cough, using surgical masks, handwashing, and placing used tissues in no-touch receptacles. Cloth masks have been characterized as “OPP” or “Other Personal Protective” equipment and should not be confused with “PPE” or “Personal Protective Equipment” which have approved or certified by federal regulatory agencies (for example NIOSH).

Design and Safe Use of Cloth Masks

Cloth mask design will vary, depending on the pattern used and availability of materials. The choice of design and fabric may result in differences in fit and effectiveness. Fabric should preferentially be a tightly woven cotton material (ideally mechanically woven) and breathable. The use of items such as loosely knit scarves and sweaters to produce masks is not recommended because they are not tightly woven. The CDC has published guidance for making sewn and “no sew” cloth masks using a variety of common household items ([Click Here](#)). The inclusion of wires across the bridge of your nose will improve the fit.

Anyone using a cloth mask should have at least two (2) masks per person in order to change out used (unclean) masks or replace if damaged or broken. Users of cloth face coverings must learn to safely apply and remove the mask to avoid risk of infection. Instructions are provided below as well as minimum recommendations on when to wash or change your mask. For a visual demonstration, [watch this video](#).

Putting on Your Mask:

1. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or apply 70% alcohol-based hand rub.
2. With clean hands, place the elastic bands over your ears so the mask stretches across your face. For masks with ties, start with the top set of ties followed by the lower set of ties.
3. Next, make sure the mask covers your mouth and nose with no gaps between your face and the mask. Using your index finger, check for large gaps on the sides and below your chin. Do not touch the front of the mask with your hands. If there are gaps you will need to tighten the straps.
4. Move your head up and down, and left to right, to make sure the ties or elastic bands are firmly holding the mask in place. Your movements may be limited by wearing the mask, but ensuring a proper and secure fit is necessary for mask performance. Make any necessary adjustments before you leave.

Removing Your Mask:

1. Clean your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or apply 70% alcohol-based hand rub.
2. Next, with clean hands, remove the elastic bands over your ears one at a time. For masks with ties, start by loosening the lower set of ties, followed by the top set of ties. For both mask types, you should remove and hold the mask by pinching either the elastic band (ear loop) or top set of ties between the thumb and index finger of each hand. Do not touch anywhere on the face piece of the mask.
3. Finally, place the mask in a designated container for laundering. The designated container should be washable or disposable, e.g. a Ziploc® bag. Follow the CDC guidance for laundering clothing, which includes masks ([Click Here](#)).



When to Change Your Mask:

1. Replace the mask with after each use.
2. Replace the mask if broken, damaged, or when it no longer fits properly to your face.

Where Should Cloth Masks Be Used

With the release of the recent recommendations, many people may start to wear masks in public. This does not mean that they have COVID-19. Wearing a mask is a protective measure for both the wearer and the people they meet. The CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores, pharmacies, certain work settings and on public transportation), especially in areas where significant community-based transmission of COVID-19 is occurring. The use of a cloth mask may also prevent direct hand contact with the face as well as reduce anxiety for those having difficulty coping with the stress of the pandemic. In addition to public (community) settings, the CDC also suggests those caring for the ill ([Click Here](#)) and/or those that are ill ([Click Here](#)) may benefit from use of cloth masks. Cloth masks are *not recommended* for individuals currently experiencing breathing difficulties, children under age two (2), anyone who regularly has trouble breathing, or persons unable to remove the mask without assistance. Current CDC guidelines are on their website ([Click Here](#)). NOTE: Employees in healthcare or public health settings should determine if their organization allows their use and under what circumstances.

Maintaining Social Distancing and Hand Hygiene While Using Cloth Masks

Cloth masks **will not** prevent you from being infected with COVID-19, but act as one more protective barrier in reducing exposure risk. As a result, **you must still** abide by recommendations from CDC, including:

1. **Maintaining proper social distancing – a minimum of 6 feet between you and others around you.**
2. **Proper, frequent handwashing for minimum of 20 seconds with soap and water.**
 - a. Use hand sanitizer (70% alcohol content) where handwashing is not possible. Rub hands until dry.
3. **Avoid touching your face, mouth, eyes, and nose**
 - a. If you do, wash or sanitize your hands immediately prior regardless of etiquette or equipment used.
4. **Cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow or a tissue.**
 - a. Throw away used tissues and immediately perform hand washing or sanitizing.
5. **Do not share any personal items, including surgical masks.**
 - a. Do not place surgical masks on counters or other works surfaces.
 - b. Keep personal items separate and away from work or shared surfaces.
6. **Avoid close contact to those that are sick.**
 - a. If you cannot, wear a facemask to assist or care for those that are.
7. **If you do not feel well and are exhibiting symptoms, do not come to work.**

All masks **must be thorough cleaned** before their next use. Do not use them if they become wet or dirty. Do not share used masks with others. Clean masks must be stored in a dry location; do not store in shared locations (e.g. on counters or tables). Always wash or sanitize hands your hands before touching and storing masks.

Additional Cloth Mask Instructions and Designs:

- Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin: [Hand-Sewn Mask Instructions](#)
- Childrens Hospital of Wisconsin: [Hand-Sewn Mask Instructions](#)
- National Jewish Health: [Machine-Sewn Mask Instructions](#)