



Plain Language Edition

What you need to know about COVID-19 and wearing a mask

Why should I wear a mask?

It is important that we all keep wearing masks. Masks protect us from COVID-19. COVID-19 spreads through the air. It spreads through tiny germs in the air. Masks filter the air you breathe. Masks can filter out the tiny COVID-19 germs. Masks can keep you from breathing in COVID-19 germs. If you have COVID-19, masks can keep you from giving COVID-19 to other people.

What are the different types of masks?

There are different types of masks. Some masks are made of cloth. Some masks are made of plastic. The plastic feels very soft, like cloth or paper. There are four main types of masks. Each type of mask protects you differently. We will list the types of masks from the one that protects you the best to the one that protects you the least. Remember, any mask is better than no mask.

The types of masks are:

- N95 masks
- KN95 and KF94 masks
- Surgical masks
- Cloth masks

Some masks have exhale valves on them. Exhale valves are pieces of hard plastic on the outside of the mask. DON'T wear masks with exhale valves on them. Exhale valves can make it easier for COVID-19 germs to get in or out of the mask. Exhale valves make the mask not work as well against COVID-19.

What are N95 masks?

The best masks are called **N95 masks**. N95 masks are made of soft plastic. They feel like they are made of paper or cloth. N95 masks cover all around your nose and mouth. N95 masks fit closely to your face. N95 masks are shaped to fit over your nose and mouth. You should wear an N95 mask if you can.

N95 masks are sometimes called respirators. Respirator is another word for mask.

What are KN95 and KF94 masks?

The next best type of masks are called **KN95 masks** or **KF94 masks**. KN95 and KF94 masks are also made of soft plastic. They feel like they are made of paper or cloth. KN95 and KF94 masks also cover all around your nose and mouth.

KN95 and KF94 masks fit almost as closely as N95 masks. KN95 and KF94 masks also are shaped to fit over your nose and mouth. KN95 and KF94 masks are almost as good as N95 masks. If you can't wear an N95 mask, try wearing a KN95 or KF94 mask.

KN95/KF94 masks are sometimes called respirators. Respirator is another word for mask.

What are surgical masks?

The third best type of masks are **surgical masks**. Surgical masks are also made of soft plastic. They feel like they are made of paper or cloth. Surgical masks also cover all around your nose and mouth.

But surgical masks are much looser than N95 masks. They don't fit your face closely. Surgical masks leave little gaps where some COVID-19 germs can get in or out. Surgical masks are not as good as N95 masks, KN95 masks, or KF94 masks. But, any mask is better than no mask.

What about cloth masks?

The last type of masks are **cloth masks**. Cloth masks are made of fabric. Cloth masks also cover all around your nose and mouth. Cloth masks can fit differently. Some fit very closely to your face, like a N95 mask. Some fit much looser, like a surgical mask.

Because cloth masks are made of fabric, they have tiny holes in them. Some COVID-19 germs can get in and out through these holes. Cloth masks are not as good as N95 masks, KN95 masks, KF94 masks, or surgical masks. But, any mask is better than no mask.

Can I wear my mask more than one time?

Yes. You can wear your mask multiple times before it needs to be washed or thrown out.

Cloth masks can be washed. Try to wash your cloth masks at least once a week. If your cloth mask is dirty, wash it as soon as possible. If your cloth mask is damaged or has holes in it, get a new one. Throw the old mask out.

Surgical masks, KF94/KN95 masks, and N95 masks cannot be washed. When they get dirty, they need to be thrown out. Try to wear a new surgical mask each day. But you can wear a KF94/KN95 mask or N95 mask more than one time. You can wear a KF94/KN95 mask or N95 mask for up to a week. Once the week is up, throw the mask out. Throw your KF94/KN95 or N95 mask out as soon as possible if:

- It is dirty (on the inside or outside)
- Part of it (like the ear or head straps) are falling off
- It is bent or creased
- You have a harder time than usual breathing in it

I can't wear an N95 mask or KN95/KF94 mask. How can I make my masks safer?

You can wear a close-fitting cloth mask over a surgical mask. This makes it harder for COVID-19 germs to get in or out. Wearing a cloth mask over a surgical mask means COVID-19 germs have to go through more layers to get in or out. That makes it less likely COVID-19 germs will get in or out.

Look for masks with a nose wire. A nose wire is a piece of wire or metal inside the mask. The nose wire bends to fit the mask better around your nose. This means there are less gaps for COVID-19 germs to get in or out.

You can also wear a mask brace. Mask braces are also called mask fitters. A mask brace is a piece of plastic that goes over your mask. It helps fit the mask to your face better. That way, there are less gaps for COVID-19 germs to get in or out. You can buy a mask brace online and at many stores.

There are different types of N95 and KN95 or KF94 masks. The different types are shaped in different ways. If you can, try out a few different types of masks. You might find one that fits your face better. You might find one that is easier to wear.

What if I can't wear a mask at all?

Some people with disabilities can't wear masks at all. That's okay. It doesn't make you a bad person.

If you can wear a mask a little bit of the time, try to wear a mask when you can. If you can wear certain types of masks, wear the masks that you can.

If you can't wear a mask, you can try wearing a face shield. A face shield is a piece of plastic that goes in front of your face. It does not protect you as well as a mask does. But a face shield can protect you a little bit.

If you can wear a mask, you should wear one. Not everyone can wear a mask. People who can't wear a mask are counting on the rest of us to wear our masks. They are counting on us to help protect them. When you wear a mask, you protect other people who can't wear masks from COVID-19.

Words to Know

N95 mask

N95 masks are the best kind of mask. They are made of soft plastic. The plastic feels like paper or cloth. N95 masks fit very closely to your face. They keep most COVID-19 germs from getting in or out.

KN95/KF94 mask

KN95/KF94 masks are the second best kind of mask. They are made of soft plastic. The plastic feels like paper or cloth. KN95/KF94 masks fit closely to your face. They keep most COVID-19 germs from getting in or out.

Surgical mask

Surgical masks are the third best kind of mask. They are made of soft plastic. The plastic feels like paper or cloth. Surgical masks fit loosely. They keep some COVID-19 germs from getting in or out.

Cloth mask

Cloth masks are the fourth best kind of mask. They are made of soft fabric. Cloth masks can fit loosely or closely to your face. They keep some COVID-19 germs from getting in or out.

Respirator

Another word for mask.

Face shield

A piece of plastic that goes in front of your face. A does not protect you as well as a mask does. But a face shield can protect you a little bit.

To Learn More

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Wearing a Mask: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/easy-to-read/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>
- Minnesota Department of Health How to Safely Wear Your Mask: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/masksafely.pdf>
- World Health Organization Videos and Graphics on wearing a mask: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>
- Project N95 (Not Easy-Read/Plain Language): <https://www.projectn95.org/>
- CDC Your Guide to Masks (Not Easy-Read/Plain Language): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>
- CDC Types of Masks and Respirators (Not Easy-Read/Plain Language): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html>
- CDC Improve How Your Mask Protects You (Not Easy-Read/Plain Language): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/effective-masks.html>
- CDC How to Use Your N95 Respirator (Not Easy-Read/Plain Language): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/use-n95-respirator.html>