



Face Masks

Utilization and Limitations

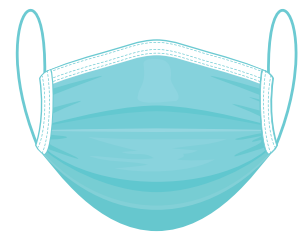
Many of us either want to or may be required to wear a face mask. As with any form of recognized personal protective equipment, nothing provides “absolute” protection. However, you might be able to improve the potential effectiveness of a face mask by proper use, removal and disposal.

What is a face mask?

A face mask is one tool that can be utilized for preventing the spread of communicable disease. They are also often referred to as dental, isolation, medical, procedure, or surgical masks. Face masks are typically loose-fitting masks that cover the nose and mouth, and have ear loops or ties or bands at the back of the head. There are a number of brands and can be found in a variety of colors.

What is a face mask used for?

Facemasks can help limit the spread of germs. When someone talks, coughs, or sneezes they may release tiny droplets into the air that can infect others. If someone is ill, a face mask can reduce the number of germs that the wearer releases and can protect other people from becoming sick.



A face mask is one tool that can be utilized for preventing the spread of communicable disease.

How to put on a face mask

1. Wash your hands with soap and water for a minimum of twenty seconds or apply hand sanitizer before touching the mask.
2. Remove a mask from the box and make sure there are no obvious tears or holes in either side of the mask.
3. Determine which side of the mask is the top. Your mask may have a stiff bendable edge at the top which is meant to mold to the shape of your nose.
4. Determine which side of the mask is the front. The colored side of the mask is usually the front and should face away from you, while the white side touches your face.
5. Follow the instructions below for the type of mask you are using.
 - Face Mask With Ear Loops: Hold the mask by the ear loops. Place a loop around each ear.
 - Face Mask With Ties: Bring the mask to your nose level and place the ties over the crown of your head and secure with a bow.
 - Face Mask with Bands: Hold the mask in your hand with the nosepiece or top of the mask at fingertips, allowing the headbands to hang freely below hands. Bring the mask to your nose level and pull the top strap over your head so that it rests over the crown of your head. Pull the bottom strap over your head so that it rests at the nape of your neck. Mold or pinch the stiff edge to the shape of your nose.
6. Pull the bottom of the mask over your mouth and chin. Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

Face mask limitations

- To achieve high filtering efficiency, a mask must fit well.
- Anyone with facial hair (beard, goatee or busy mustache) should consider shaving so you get the best possible mask-to-face seal.
- Replace a damp/wet face mask with a new one as soon as it becomes moist.
- Do not temporarily remove the mask from your mouth/nose and hang it from your neck or place it on your forehead.
- Do not re-use single-use masks.
- Masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

How to remove a face mask

1. Clean your hands with soap and water for at least twenty seconds or apply hand sanitizer before touching the mask.
2. Avoid touching the front of the mask. The front of the mask is contaminated.
3. Only touch the ear loops/ties/band.
4. Follow the instructions below for the type of mask you are using.
 - Face Mask with Ear loops: Hold both of the ear loops and gently lift and remove the mask.
 - Face Mask with Ties: Untie the bottom bow first, then untie the top bow and pull the mask away from you as the ties are loosened.
 - Face Mask with Bands: Lift the bottom strap over your head first, then pull the top strap over your head.
5. Properly discard the mask. Clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer.

Sources: World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and San Francisco Department of Health

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