

**Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19):
Guidance about Cloth Face Coverings and Masks for the General Public**

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 requires that everyone in our community be mindful and vigilant about staying safe. This means finding ways to protect yourself, your family, and your community. Below are recommendations that the general public should follow for using cloth face coverings and facemasks to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Visit coronavirus.dc.gov for the latest COVID-19 information.

Types of Face Coverings

- **Cloth face coverings:** (such as homemade cloth masks, store-bought fabric masks, bandanas, etc.) These can generally be washed and reused.
- **Clear masks:** (or cloth masks with a clear plastic panel) An alternative mask for people who interact with people who are deaf, students learning to read, students learning a new language, or people with disabilities.
- **Non-medical disposable masks:** These are masks look similar to medical grade masks but are not intended for medical use. They vary widely in quality and are unregulated and will not have the FDA seal of approval nor ASTM (American Society of Testing and Materials) protection level listed on the box.
- **Medical-grade face masks** (for example medical, surgical, or procedure masks): These masks meet strict quality, filtration, and splash resistance requirements. Medical grade face masks are regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and come in 3 different protection levels rated by the ASTM (American Society of Testing and Materials). Medical grade face masks will have the FDA seal of approval and ASTM protection level listed on the box. These masks are disposable.
- **Respirators** (for example N95 or K95): These are specialized medical supplies and should not be purchased or used by members of the general public. They should be reserved for healthcare workers and other professionals whose job tasks require their use and have been trained to wear them properly.
- **Masks with exhalation valves or vents should not be worn** to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- **Any cloth face coverings and face masks should be worn so that it covers your nose and mouth and fits snugly against the sides of your face to be the most effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19.**

How to Select the Most Effective Mask or Cloth Face Covering

It is important to select a mask that meets a certain standard to ensure it is being effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Not all masks that are available provide this protection, so it is important to review details about a mask before wearing.

- When selecting a cloth face covering, it is recommended to choose one that is made with:
 - tightly woven fabrics, such as cotton and cotton blends, that does not let light pass through when held up to a light source;
 - two or three fabric layers;
 - or inner filter pockets.
- Do not select a mask/cloth face covering that is made with:
 - material that is hard to breathe through such as plastic or leather
 - loosely woven fabrics or that is knitted
 - one layer
 - exhalation valves.

- Scarves, ski masks and balaclavas are not substitute for masks and should be worn over your mask.
- If you wear glasses, find a mask that fits closely over your nose or one that has a nose wire to limit fogging.
- Wearing multiple masks may cause masks to not fit properly. It is more important to wear a mask that has the recommended number of layers and good fit.

Why Cloth Face Coverings and Masks are Important

- **Masks protect the wearer and protect other people.**
- COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through droplets that travel through the air after an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice.
- COVID-19 can be spread by people who do not have symptoms and do not know that they are infected.
- Wearing a cloth face covering or face mask acts as a barrier to prevent droplets from reaching other people and helps prevent spread of COVID-19 in the community.

Who Should Not Wear a Cloth Face Covering or Mask

- Children younger than age 2
- Anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance.
- Wearing a cloth face covering may not be possible in every situation. Adaptations and alterations can be considered in some situations, for example:
 - Small children may have difficulty wearing a cloth face covering properly for an extended period of time. In these circumstances, wearing cloth face coverings could be prioritized for times where social distancing is more difficult (e.g., when standing in line at school, carpool pickup and drop-off times).
 - Some people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions or other sensory sensitivities may have difficulties wearing a cloth face covering and should consult with their healthcare provider for advice.

When Wearing a Cloth Face Covering or Mask is Not Required

- **A face mask is not required during the following activities when a person is:**
 - actively eating or drinking;
 - engaged in vigorous outdoor exercise and is maintaining social distance of at least six (6) feet from other persons;
 - walking, running, biking, or roller-skating/rollerblading outdoors with members of their own household;
 - in the water at a swimming pool or aquatic facility;
 - in an enclosed office that no one else is permitted to enter;
 - giving a speech for broadcast or an audience, provided no one is within six feet of the speaker;
 - speaking to or translating for a deaf or hard of hearing person;
 - required to use equipment for a job that precludes the wearing of a mask and the person is wearing or using that equipment, or when wearing a mask would endanger public safety.
- For people who are **fully vaccinated** (14 days after completion of a COVID-19 vaccine series (after the second dose of a two-dose series, or after one dose of a single-dose vaccine)), certain activities can be done without a face mask at low risk to themselves. These include:
 - Participating in casual outdoor activities with members of their own household;

- participating in small¹ group gatherings outdoors;
- visiting indoors with a small group of fully vaccinated people in a home setting;
- visiting indoors with unvaccinated people from a single household.
 - If a fully vaccinated person visits an unvaccinated person who is at higher risk of having severe COVID-19², everyone should wear a mask and socially distance.
- For complete details, please review the *Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People* at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance.
- **There are some activities that unvaccinated** people can participate in without face masks at low-risk to themselves, if engaging with fully vaccinated people outdoors. People who have not yet received the vaccine may do the following activities without face masks:
 - attending a small outdoor gathering with friends and/or family who are fully vaccinated;
 - visiting indoors with fully vaccinated people from one household.
- Please note that people who are **at high risk of severe disease from COVID-19²** and have not yet been vaccinated should wear a face mask and maintain 6 feet of distance when interacting with people outside of their household.

When to Wear a Cloth Face Covering or a Mask

- You must wear a cloth face covering or mask when inside of a business, office building, gym or other establishment open to the members of the public. You must also wear a mask in the common areas of apartments, condominiums and cooperatives.
- You must wear a cloth face covering or mask when riding in a taxi, ride-share, or on public transportation in DC. Additionally, effective February 2, 2021, nationally masks must be worn on planes, buses, trains, and other forms of public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States and in U.S. transportation hubs such as airports and stations as per CDC guidelines.
- Any other setting that does not meet the exceptions for mask wearing in the preceding section.
- Wearing a cloth face covering or mask does not take away the need for social distancing or other everyday precautions like staying at home when you are sick, and frequent hand hygiene.
- A face shield is not an acceptable alternative for wearing a cloth face covering or a mask.

How to Correctly Wear Your Cloth Face Covering or Mask

- Before putting on a cloth face covering or face mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water.
- Adjust your cloth face covering and face masks so that it covers your nose and mouth and fits snugly against the sides of your face.
- Do not put your cloth face covering or face mask around your neck or up on your forehead.
- Avoid touching the cloth face covering or face mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water.
- Remove your cloth face covering or face mask and replace with another if it becomes visibly dirty, wet, or difficult to breathe through.
- To remove the cloth face covering or face mask:
 - Handle it by the string ties or ear loops only. Untie the strings behind your head or stretch the ear loops and remove. Avoid touching the front of the face covering.
 - Fold outside corners together (so the outside part is folded into itself).

¹ A small group gathering is defined as a casual gathering with family and/or friends with whom you regularly socialize, often at someone's residence, and usually does not involve travel.

² For a list of conditions which put people at risk for severe COVID-19 see *Guidance for People with Chronic Conditions* at coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance

- Clean hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water immediately after removing the cloth face covering or facemask.

How to Care for Your Cloth Face Covering or Mask

- Cloth face coverings can be machine-washed with your regular laundry, using the warmest appropriate water setting and drying it using the highest heat setting.
- Instructions for washing a cloth face covering by hand is available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wash-cloth-face-coverings](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wash-cloth-face-coverings)
- Face masks cannot be washed. Discard a face mask when it becomes soiled (visibly dirty), damaged, or hard to breathe through.

More information

- Find out more about the COVID-19 vaccine at coronavirus.dc.gov/vaccine.
- For more information about the use of cloth face coverings, see [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings)

The guidelines above will continue to be updated as the outbreak evolves. Please visit coronavirus.dc.gov for the most updated information.