



GUIDANCE ON HOMEMADE MASKS DURING COVID-19

The Department of Health has received inquiries requesting additional guidance and clarification regarding making and wearing masks in public spaces during the (COVID-19) outbreak. The Department is issuing the below guidance in response.

Use of Personal Protective Equipment

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is a type of specialized clothing, barrier product, or breathing device used to protect workers from serious injuries or illnesses while doing their jobs. These include gloves (vinyl, latex or nitrile); gowns; shoe and head covers; mask or respirators (N95 respirator); and other face and eye protection (goggles or a face shield). Health care providers need to use PPE. Healthcare facilities and providers that need additional PPE should refer to [this guide](#).

Use of Fabric or Cloth Masks

Homemade masks made out of fabric and cloth are not considered PPE. However, homemade masks can be an effective complement to handwashing, social-distancing and other mitigation measures.

Homemade masks limit the spread of infectious droplets in the air by containing coughs and sneezes. When a homemade mask can't be acquired a scarf or bandana can be utilized. By implementing community use of these homemade fabric or cloth masks, everyone will have a higher degree of protection from this virus.

My Mask Protects You, Your Mask Protects Me

Those who are staying home and have no close contacts who are infected with COVID-19 don't need a mask most of the time. However, wearing a nonmedical or homemade mask may be helpful in certain situations or for certain populations*.

- Shopping at essential businesses, like grocery stores or pharmacies;
- While visiting your health care provider;
- Traveling on public transportation;
- Interacting with customers/clients at essential businesses;
- When feeling sick, coughing, or sneezing;

Because homemade masks protect everyone else from the droplets created by the wearer, it is important that as many people as possible wear these masks when leaving their homes. This helps prevent those who may be infectious but are only mildly symptomatic or not symptomatic from spreading the virus to others in the community. Everyone should remember the phrase “my mask protects you, your mask protects me.” By increasing the overall number of people who are



containing their coughs, sneezes, and other droplets, it will help us control the overall spread of the virus.

Help Support Health Care Workers

Do not purchase masks designed for health care professionals. N95 and surgical masks are designed to protect those who are working in high risk situations with a likelihood of exposure. Instead, make your own mask or purchase one from an online small business.

Businesses should consider purchasing homemade or cloth masks for their employees as part of their uniform or in recognition of good public health practices. Businesses should also consider non-punitive policies that encourage employees to wear masks while at work.

Best Practices for Homemade Masks:

The best practices for making and wearing fabric or cloth masks include:

- Consider buying materials online to avoid exposure in public places;
- Purchase masks made by small businesses, saving medical masks for health care workers;
- Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water;
- The mask should fit snugly around the mouth and nose;
- If the mask has a metal wire it should be fitted snugly to the bridge of the nose.
- Avoid touching the mask while using it, if you do wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub;
- Made out of two layers of tightly woven 100% cotton fabric;
- Be discarded or washed after every use;
- Should not be worn damp or when wet from spit or mucus;
- To remove the mask: remove it from behind, do not touch the front of mask;
- The wearer should immediately wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds after removing the mask.

How to Maximize Prevention Efforts:

Wearing a mask alone is not effective in reducing transmission of COVID-19. The below recommendations should be followed by everyone to help slow the spread of and minimize exposure to COVID-19.

- Practice social distancing, meaning staying at least 6 feet apart from others when in public or outdoors;
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or using hand sanitizer when soap and water is not immediately available;
- Cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow;



- Avoid touching your face;
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces;
- Stay home and limit public outings to only essential, life-sustaining activities.

Populations at Highest Risk:

Defined by CDC as:

- Persons 65 or older
- Persons living in a nursing home facility
- Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- Serious heart conditions
- Conditions that can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications.
- Severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
- Diabetes
- Chronic kidney disease and who are undergoing dialysis
- Liver disease

How to Make a Homemade Mask out of Fabric or Cloth:

Below are instructions on how to make a mask at home.

Materials needed:

- Fabric (100% cotton is most effective)
- Fabric Ties
- Scissors
- Sewing machine or a needle and thread

Instructions:

- Measure and cut two pieces of fabric in a rectangle pattern to fit snugly around the face (size 12 inches by 6 inches is standard for adults)
- Tightly sew both layers together on all edges
- Cut fabric ties to fit around the ears
- Sew the ties to the insides of the mask on the smaller edge, repeat on both sides
- Resew the sides to ensure a tight seal between both pieces of fabric and the earpiece

Tutorials/Resources:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/article/how-to-make-face-mask-coronavirus.html>

BACKGROUND

The 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new virus that causes respiratory illness in people and can spread from person-to-person. Facemasks and respirators offer a physical barrier to contact with respiratory droplets and aerosols. When used correctly, masks, along with other preventative measures such as hand washing, and social distancing reduce the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission leading to COVID-19 infection.

WHAT KIND OF MASKS ARE THERE?

There are several different types of masks and each has their own purpose:

- **Homemade Mask-** Homemade masks are designed to contain coughs and sneezes and prevent the disease from spreading to others. These are recommended for the general public when a person can't perform social distancing. Use these masks if you are coughing or sneezing, using public transportation or shopping and working at essential businesses like grocery stores and pharmacies. Homemade masks or cloth masks should be washed after each use and should not be worn when damp or wet.
- **Surgical Mask-** Surgical masks are designed for health care workers to stop aerosols from being spread by the person wearing it. These are recommended for health care providers during single or multiple patient interactions or routine health procedures. Surgical masks are also recommended when N95 masks are not available. Ideally these should be discarded after each patient encounter. Extended use is preferable to reuse. Both are important and viable options when supplies are limited.
- **N95 Respirator-** N95 Respirators are designed for health care workers in high risk situations and protect the person wearing them from aerosols, splatter, sprays or blood. These are recommended for health care providers who are performing procedures that put them most at risk of being exposed to the virus. Ideally these should be thrown away after each patient encounter. Extended use is preferable to reuse. Both are important and viable options when supplies are limited.

WHAT KIND OF MASK SHOULD I WEAR?

- I am a member of the general public—I should wear a **HOMEMADE** mask. I can make my own mask or use a scarf or bandana.
- I am a healthcare worker in a moderate risk situation or a patient in a healthcare setting—I should wear a **SURGICAL MASK**.
- I am a healthcare worker in a high-risk situation—I should wear a **N95 RESPIRATOR**.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on masks, follow CDC guidance on [Strategies to Optimize the Supply of PPE Equipment](#)

For more information on COVID-19 in Pennsylvania, visit

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>.

The latest information on the coronavirus in the U.S. and worldwide can be found on the [CDC website](#).

Additional information from the CDC on what to do if you are sick can be found [here](#).

Help is available, contact the Crisis Text Line by texting **PA to 741-741**.

Understanding the Difference: Homemade Masks

	N95 Respirator	Surgical Mask	Homemade Mask or Paper Mask
User	Health Care Workers	Health Care Workers and patients in healthcare settings	General Public
Risk Factor	High Risk Situations	Moderate Risk Situations	Low Risk Situations
Design	Designed to protect the person wearing the mask from aerosols, splatter, sprays, or blood.	Designed for health care workers to stop droplets being spread by the wearer – NOT to protect the wearer from breathing in aerosols.	Designed to contain coughs and sneezes and prevent disease transmission to others – NOT to protect the wearer from breathing in aerosols.
When To Wear	Recommended for use when health care workers care for patients with COVID-19 and performing procedures that put them most at risk of virus exposure.	Recommended for health care providers during single or multiple patient interactions or routine health procedures. Surgical masks are also recommended when N95s are not available.	Recommended for use when a person can't perform social distancing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When coughing or sneezing. • Using public transportation. • Shopping and working at essential businesses like grocery stores and pharmacies.
Fit Testing Required	Yes. Due to the fit, the wearer may find it hard to breathe. These masks are designed only for health care workers who have been fit tested.	No	No Scarves and bandanas can be used if necessary.
Use Limitations	Ideally should be discarded after each patient encounter. Extended use is preferable to reuse. Both are important and viable options when supplies are limited. Extended use is preferable. Follow CDC guidance on Strategies to Optimize the Supply of PPE Equipment	Ideally should be discarded after each patient encounter. Extended use is preferable to reuse. Both are important and viable options when supplies are limited. Extended use is preferable. Follow CDC guidance on Strategies to Optimize the Supply of PPE Equipment	Homemade/Cloth Masks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be washed after each use. • Should not be worn damp or when wet from spit or mucus.

Facemasks and respirators offer a physical barrier to contact with respiratory droplets and aerosols. When used correctly, masks, along with other preventative measures such as hand washing, and social distancing reduce the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission leading to COVID-19 infection.

Help Support Health Care Workers

Do not purchase masks designed for health care professionals. N95 and surgical masks are designed to protect those who are working in high risk situations with a likelihood of exposure. Instead, make your own mask or purchase one from an online small business.