



COVID-19

Your Guide to Masks

Updated Aug. 13, 2021 [Print](#)

- If you are not fully vaccinated and aged 2 or older, you should wear a mask in indoor public places.
- In general, you do not need to wear a mask in outdoor settings.
 - In areas with high numbers of COVID-19 cases, consider wearing a mask in crowded outdoor settings and for activities with close contact with others who are not fully vaccinated.
- People who have a condition or are taking medications that weaken their immune system may not be fully protected even if they are fully vaccinated. They should continue to take all precautions recommended for unvaccinated people, including wearing a well-fitted mask, until advised otherwise by their healthcare provider.
- If you are fully vaccinated, to maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent possibly spreading it to others, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission.
- If you are fully vaccinated, see [When You've Been Fully Vaccinated](#).



COVID-19 County Check

Find community transmission levels by county.

Select a Location

State

County



Wearing a mask over your nose and mouth is required on planes, buses, trains, and other forms of public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States and while indoors at U.S. transportation hubs such as airports and stations. Travelers are not required to wear a mask in outdoor areas of a conveyance (like on open deck areas of a ferry or the uncovered top deck of a bus).

How to Select

When selecting a mask, there are many choices. Here are some do's and don'ts.

DO choose masks that



Have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric



Completely cover your nose and mouth

Fit snugly against the sides of your face and don't have gaps

DO NOT choose masks that



Are made of fabric that makes it hard to breathe, for example, vinyl



Have exhalation valves or vents which allow virus particles to escape



Have a nose wire to prevent air from leaking out of the top of the mask



Are prioritized for healthcare workers (e.g., N95 respirators labeled as "surgical" or "medical")

Special Considerations

Gaiters & face shields



Wear a gaiter with two layers, or fold it to make two layers



Not recommended: Evaluation of face shields is ongoing, but effectiveness is unknown at this time.

Children



Find a mask that is made for children to help ensure proper fit



Check to be sure the mask fits snugly over the nose and mouth and under the chin and that there are no gaps around the sides



Do NOT put on children younger than 2 years old

People with beards

Certain types of facial hair, like beards, can make mask fitting difficult. Masks that fit well protect you better. To have a better fit, people with beards can shave their beards or trim their beards close to the face.

Other ways to improve fit



Use a mask fitter or brace.



Wear one disposable mask underneath a cloth mask that has multiple layers of fabric. The second mask should push the edges of the inner mask against the face and beard.

For people with beards that are not trimmed close to the face, masks may fit loosely around the beard. However, people with beards should still wear a mask. Masks designed for people with beards are being evaluated, and information will be provided when it becomes available.

Wearing a mask does not raise the carbon dioxide (CO₂) level in the air you breathe

Cloth masks and surgical masks do not provide an airtight fit across the face. The CO₂ escapes into the air through the mask when you breathe out or talk. CO₂ molecules are small enough to easily pass through mask material. In contrast, the respiratory droplets that carry the virus that causes COVID-19 are much larger than CO₂, so they cannot pass as easily through a properly designed and properly worn mask.

How to Wear

Wear a mask correctly and consistently for the best protection.

- Be sure to wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before putting on a mask.
- Do NOT touch the mask when wearing it. If you have to often touch/adjust your mask, it doesn't fit you properly, and you may need to find a different mask or make adjustments.

Do wear a mask that



- Covers your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin.
- Fits snugly against the sides of your face.

How NOT to wear a mask



Around your neck



On your forehead



Under your nose



Only on your nose



On your chin



Dangling from one ear



On your arm

How to take off a mask



①

Carefully, untie the strings behind your head or stretch the ear loops



②

Handle only by the ear loops or ties



③

Fold the outside corners together



④

Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing and wash hands immediately after removing

How to Clean

Reusable masks should be washed whenever it gets dirty or at least daily. If you have a disposable face mask, throw it away after wearing it once. Always and wash your hands after handling or touching a used mask.



Using a washing machine



- Include your mask with your regular laundry.
- Use regular laundry detergent and the appropriate settings according to the fabric label.

By hand



- Wash your mask with tap water and laundry detergent or soap.
- Rinse thoroughly with clean water to remove detergent or soap.

Dry your mask

Dryer

- Dry your mask completely in a warm or hot dryer



By hand



- Hang your mask in direct sunlight to dry completely. If you cannot hang it in direct sunlight, hang or lay it flat and let it dry completely.

For information on the sources for our mask guidance, see [Recent Studies](#).

How to Store

Store wet or dirty masks in a plastic bag



If your mask is wet or dirty from sweat, saliva, make-up, or other liquids or substances, keep it in a sealed plastic bag until you can wash it. Wash wet or dirty masks as soon as possible to prevent them from becoming moldy. Wet masks can be hard to breathe through and are less effective than dry masks.

Store masks that are not wet or dirty in a paper bag



You can store your mask temporarily to reuse later. Remove your mask correctly and wash your hands after touching a used mask. Keep it in a dry, breathable bag (like a paper or mesh fabric bag) to keep it clean between uses. When reusing your mask, keep the same side facing out.

If you are taking off your mask to eat or drink outside of your home, you can place it somewhere safe to keep it clean, such as your pocket, purse, or paper bag. Make sure to wash or sanitize your hands after removing your mask. After eating, put the mask back on with the same side facing out. Be sure to wash or sanitize your hands again after putting your mask back on.