



GUIDANCE FOR THE USE OF FACE COVERINGS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This document provides information about the use of cloth face coverings by the public when outside of the home and performing essential activities. Consistent with the Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC), the Division of Public Health (DPH) recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies). This is a recommendation not a requirement. It is also not a substitute for existing guidance about handwashing and social distancing. **It's important to note that the primary purpose of wearing a mask is not to protect yourself – it is to protect others.**

Public Health Guidance

- The best defense against COVID-19 is frequent hand washing, avoiding being around sick people, staying home/physical distancing, and avoiding touching your face, mouth, eyes, and nose with unwashed hands.
- There may be a benefit to reducing asymptomatic transmission and reinforcing physical distancing through the use of face coverings. However, face coverings may increase risk if users reduce their use of other protective measures, such as physical distancing and frequent hand washing, when using face coverings.

Considerations

- This guidance is for the use of cloth face coverings only. Members of the general public are not recommended to use medical/surgical masks, as doing so could further endanger critically low levels of personal protective equipment for healthcare personnel.
- Individuals may wear cloth face coverings but should practice strict hand washing before and after touching and adjusting the mask. Face coverings are not a replacement for washing hands, physical distancing while performing essential activities, and staying home.
- If you are sick, you should wear a cloth face covering over your nose and mouth if you must be around other people even at home.

BACKGROUND

What is a cloth face covering?

A cloth face covering is a material that covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with ties or straps or simply wrapped around the lower face. It can be made of a variety of

materials, such as cotton, silk, or linen. Research has shown that certain more densely-woven fabrics may be more effective. A cloth face covering may be factory-made or sewn by hand, or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels.

How effectively do cloth face coverings prevent the spread of COVID-19?

There is limited evidence to suggest that public use of cloth face coverings during a pandemic helps reduce disease transmission. The primary role is to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes, including someone who has COVID-19 but may not show symptoms. **Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for washing hands, physical distancing while performing essential activities, and staying home, but they may be helpful when combined with these actions.**

When should I wear a cloth face covering?

You are encouraged to wear a cloth face covering when you must be in public for essential activities where it may be more difficult to maintain social distancing, such as shopping at the grocery store. Wearing a cloth face covering does not eliminate the need to physically distance yourself from others. If you are sick you should wear a cloth face covering, over your nose and mouth if you must be around other people even at home.

How should I care for a cloth face covering?

Washing your cloth face covering frequently, ideally after each use, or at least daily is strongly recommended. Use a bag or bin to store cloth face coverings until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. If you must re-wear your cloth face covering before washing, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on or adjusting the mask, and avoid touching your face. Discard cloth face coverings that:

- Have stretched out or damaged ties or straps
- No longer cover the mouth and nose
- Don't stay on the face
- Have any rips or holes in the fabric

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

Office of the Surgeon General

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPx1yqvJgf4&feature=emb_title

California Department of Public Health:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Face-Coverings-Guidance.aspx>