

COVID-19 Cloth Masks

If you can, help others; if you cannot do that, at least do not harm them -
Dalai Lama

Public health experts agree that the coronavirus is primarily spread through respiratory droplets emitted when an infected person exhales, talks, sneezes, or coughs.

A cloth mask keeps the most contagious respiratory droplets from spreading to others. A mask is particularly important because most infections are caused by people who are unaware they are infected. The most contagious period is 48 hours before the onset of symptoms while others, who show no symptoms, unknowingly transmit the virus throughout the duration of their infection.

Unfortunately, a mask does little to protect a wearer from an infected person who is not wearing a mask. That is because inhaling in a cloth mask draws air from around the edges of the mask, not through the protective cloth fabric. Consequently, an infected non-mask wearer potentially puts everyone else nearby at risk.

That's why wearing a mask is not a personal decision. Rather, it is a decision about not harming others - a collective effort - where the individual mask wearer protects the group and the group of mask wearers protects the individual.

The Effectiveness Of Masks

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

recommends that people wear cloth masks in public settings when social distancing of six feet or more is difficult to maintain. The CDC expressly exempts:

- Children younger than 2 years' old
- Anyone who has trouble breathing

- Anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance

In addition, the CDC recognizes that wearing masks may not be practical in every situation. In such cases, adaptations should be made to make mask wearing feasible or, where not possible, to reduce the likelihood of infection through social distancing.

As a preventive measure, masks were late to the game. They were not part of the initial guidance because it was not yet known that the virus was transmitted before the onset of symptoms or, in this case, by asymptomatic carriers which are estimated to account for 40% of all transmissions. Once known, the CDC delayed a formal public health recommendation fearing the announcement would increase demand for hospital-grade masks that were already in short supply.

Now, wearing a mask in public places is considered one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In fact, state legislatures have taken notice. Most **states** have passed laws that require masks in public places.

Apart from scientific evidence, the effectiveness of masking was demonstrated by two COVID-19-positive Missouri hair stylists. Their masks prevented the virus from infecting their clients - all 139 of them.

Tightly Woven

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

recommends cloth masks made from two layers of tightly woven cotton that can be laundered after each use without changing its shape.

The mask should fit snugly and comfortably against the side of the face and completely cover the nose and mouth. Covering just the mouth presents risk to other people from viral particles exhaled through the nose.

Cloth masks are not a substitute for social distancing or, where required, Personal Protective Equipment.