



## HOW TO WEAR A FACE COVERING

### *Recommendations for the General Public*

**Michigan.gov/Coronavirus**

The first respirator was certified in the United States one hundred years ago and requirements for respiratory protection in healthcare were made mandatory in the 1990s (CDC, 2019). A lot of information is available about using respirators and masks in healthcare and the workplace in safe and effective ways.

There is not as much information about cloth face coverings, and there is a wide variety in the styles and materials. Because of this, there aren't standard recommendation available, but we can use what we know about medical masks and respirators to guide how to use cloth face coverings in the safest and most effective way.

Cloth face coverings do not prevent illness in those who wear them like medical masks do (MacIntyre, et al, 2015). Wearing a cloth face covering is hoped to protect those around you in case you are infected. A cloth face covering should be worn whenever people are in a community setting, especially when you may be near people, like in grocery stores and pharmacies. It is not a substitute for social distancing. Cloth face coverings should be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape (CDC, 2020).

#### **How to wear a face covering appropriately (CDC, 2020):**

- Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer before putting on your face covering.
- Put the face covering over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin. Cloth face coverings should fit snugly but comfortably against the side of your face, secured with ties or ear loops.
- Make sure you can breathe easily without restriction when wearing the face covering.
- Avoid touching the face covering while wearing, and if you do, clean your hands.
- When removing a face covering, handle only by the ties or ear loops, and fold outside corners together to avoid touching the front of the covering.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer after removing and handling your face covering.

Cloth face coverings should not be placed on children younger than 2 years of age, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.

While safe for most people, it is possible that wearing a face covering could interfere with your (Johnson, 2016):

1. Breathing
2. Vision
3. Ability to communicate clearly
4. Self-care
5. Ability to regulate your temperature
6. Overall feelings of well-being

**Below are some suggestions that may be helpful if you are having any of these problems:**

## **1. Breathing**

The cloth face covering may cause you to rebreathe some of the carbon dioxide you have breathed out, which may cause your breathing rate to increase. If the face covering is too tight or too thick, and causes too much resistance, it may cause breathing to slow down. These changes in breathing may cause you to get lightheaded or not feel well. You may not be able to do as much or work as hard when you are wearing a face covering (Johnson, 2016).

People with allergies, runny nose, asthma, or COPD may not be able to tolerate breathing in a face covering well or for as long. Face coverings made with too many layers of cloth, tightly woven cloth, or cloth that has gotten wet from saliva or mucus are often hard to breathe through.

### **Suggestions:**

- Take breaks from your face covering
  - If you are getting episodes of lightheadedness or shortness of breath, make sure to take breaks throughout the day. Go to a private bathroom stall, go outside, go to your car, or somewhere else where you are away from others and remove your face covering for a little while. Remove the face covering by ear straps/ties, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after removing.
- Make sure the face covering is not too tight and the material is not too thick.
- Change face coverings if it gets wet or damp.
- If you have a health condition that makes wearing a face covering difficult, you do not have to wear one. Try to limit trips and if you do have to go out, social distance to the best of your ability.
- You do not have to wear a face covering if you are exercising or working outside as long as you can maintain social distancing.

## 2. Vision

Using a poorly placed face covering can cause vision to become obstructed. Glasses or goggles can become fogged up, especially in cold weather or when going from hot weather to an air-conditioned building or vehicle.

### Suggestions:

- It is not recommended that you wear a face covering while driving due to these potential hazards.
- To stop glasses from fogging, wash glasses in soapy water and let them air dry. You can also rub a dab of shaving cream into the inside of the lenses. When they are dry, use a clean dry cloth to buff off any extra. The soap or shaving cream residue will prevent fog from forming.

## 3. Ability to communicate clearly

A covering over the mouth can make it difficult for others to understand what we are saying because words are muffled and visual cues are blocked. This is worse with short or one-word statements because there isn't context to help others figure out what we are trying to say.

Face coverings also make it harder for the hard of hearing and hearing impaired to understand what you are saying.

### Suggestions:

- Be sure to face the person you are talking to and speak in clear, complete sentences.
- Consider coming up with hand signals to use for common questions and answers.
- If you are talking to someone with hearing impairments make sure there is as little background noise as possible, talk slowly and clearly, and consider using a face covering with a clear front so your mouth movements can help with communication.
  - Instructions for making a clear face covering can be found at:
    - How to Make An Accessible, Deaf-Friendly Face Mask  
<https://www.hsdcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/HSDC-Instructions-for-Clear-Window-Masks.pdf>
    - Communicator Face Mask  
<https://www.9and10news.com/content/uploads/2020/04/Communicator-Face-Mask.pdf>

## 4. Self-care

Wearing a face covering makes it difficult to eat, drink, scratch your nose, blow your nose, and so on.

### Suggestions:

- It is important to take breaks to safely take care of these needs during the day.

## 5. Ability to regulate your temperature

Using a face covering in hot temperatures can cause you to feel uncomfortable and may cause you to overheat faster. Sweat and wetness may soak into the cloth face covering, and this makes it harder to breathe through the face covering as well, making it less effective.

### Suggestions:

- Take extra breaks during hot weather, focusing on hydration and cooling down.
- Pay close attention for signs of heat illness.
- Change face coverings if yours gets wet or damp.

## 6. Overall feelings of well-being

It is not uncommon to feel some irritation or discomfort from your face covering. For some, it is much worse, and wearing a face covering can cause anxiety or feelings of claustrophobia.

### Suggestions:

- If you are worried or nervous about wearing a face covering, start by wearing it loosely for very short periods of time around the house.
  - If this isn't possible, wear it around your neck or chin until that is tolerable before putting it over your mouth.
- Gradually increase the time until you feel comfortable wearing it outside your home. Make sure you get a face covering you like that feels comfortable.

## Other Considerations:

Some experts worry that wearing a face covering or mask may cause people to touch their faces more often as they fit and adjust it. While this hasn't been proven, be aware of this possibility and avoid touching your face and face covering.

Exhaled air may be forced up into your eyes while you are wearing a face covering which might irritate your eyes. If you notice this happening, use over-the-counter lubricating eye drops but wash hands prior to use.

Dirty face coverings could be a source of germs and infection. Your face covering should be washed and dried routinely depending on the frequency of use. Use a bag or bin to store cloth face coverings until they can be laundered. Use the appropriate washer and dryer settings and detergents for the materials your face covering is made of. The cloth face covering should be washed right away if you were around someone with COVID-19 or if the covering is visibly dirty. If you must re-wear your cloth face covering before washing, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. Over time, washing and drying your cloth face covering will decrease its ability to filter out particles from your breath (Neupane, et al, 2019). Consider replacing your cloth face covering after four or five washes.

In addition, discard cloth face coverings that:

- No longer cover the nose and mouth
- Have stretched out or damaged ties or straps
- Cannot stay on the face
- Have holes or tears in the fabric

## References

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2019). The National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory (NPPTL). 100 Years of Respiratory Protection History. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/Respiratory-Protection-history.html>
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- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2020). Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>
- Johnson, A. T. (2016). Respirator masks protect health but impact performance: a review.
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