

STANDARD DEVIATIONS: The Cover-Up

Greetings,



“Just how long do you expect this plague to go on?”

Can face masks help slow the spread of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19?

Yes. Face masks combined with other preventive measures, such as getting vaccinated, frequent hand-washing and physical distancing, can help slow the spread of the virus.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends fabric masks for the general public. People who haven't been fully vaccinated should continue to wear face masks in indoor public places and outdoors where there is a high risk of COVID-19 transmission, such as crowded events or large gatherings. The CDC says that N95 masks should be reserved for health care providers.



The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends medical masks for health care workers as well as for anyone who has or may have COVID-19 or who is caring for someone who has or may have COVID-19.

Medical masks

Also called surgical masks, these are loose fitting disposable masks. They're meant to protect the wearer from contact with droplets and sprays that may contain germs. A medical mask also filters out large particles in the air when the wearer breathes in.

To make medical masks more form-fitting, knot the ear loops where they attach to the mask. Then fold and tuck the unneeded material under the edges.

N95 masks

An N95 mask is a type of respirator. It offers more protection than a medical mask does because it filters out both large and small particles when the wearer inhales.

Because N95 masks have been in short supply, the CDC has said they should be reserved for health care providers. Health care providers must be trained and pass a fit test before using an N95 mask. Like surgical masks, N95 masks are intended to be disposable. However, researchers are testing ways to disinfect and reuse them.

Some N95 masks, and even some cloth masks, have valves that make them easier to breathe through. Unfortunately, these masks don't filter the air the wearer breathes out. For this reason, they've been banned in some places.

Cloth masks

A cloth mask is intended to trap respiratory droplets that are released when the wearer talks, coughs or sneezes. It also acts as a barrier to protect the wearer from inhaling droplets released by others.

The most effective cloth masks are made of multiple layers of tightly woven fabric like cotton. A mask with layers will stop more droplets from getting through your mask or escaping from it.

The effectiveness of cloth and medical masks can be improved by ensuring that the masks are well fitted to the contours of your face to prevent leakage of air around the masks' edges.

Masks should be snug over the nose, mouth and chin, with no gaps. You should feel warm air coming through the front of the mask when you breathe out. You shouldn't feel air coming out under the edges of the mask.

Masks that have a bendable nose strip help prevent air from leaking out of the top of the mask.

Some people choose to wear a disposable mask under their cloth mask. In that case, the cloth mask should press the edges of the disposable mask against the face. Don't add layers if they make it hard to breathe or obstruct your vision.



Proper use, storage and cleaning of masks also affects how well they protect you. Follow these steps for putting on and taking off your mask:

- Wash or sanitize your hands before and after putting on your mask.
- Place your mask over your mouth and nose and chin.
- Tie it behind your head or use ear loops. Make sure it's snug.
- Don't touch your mask while wearing it.
- If you accidentally touch your mask, wash or sanitize your hands.
- If your mask becomes wet or dirty, switch to a clean one. Put the used mask in a sealable bag until you can get rid of it or wash it.
- Remove the mask by untying it or lifting off the ear loops without touching the front of the mask or your face.
- Wash your hands immediately after removing your mask.
- Regularly wash cloth masks in the washing machine or by hand. (They can be washed along with other laundry.)

And don't forget these precautions:

- Don't put masks on anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious or otherwise unable to remove the mask without help.
- Don't put masks on children under 2 years of age.
- Don't use face masks as a substitute for physical distancing.

What about face shields?

The CDC doesn't recommend using face shields instead of masks because it's unclear how much protection shields provide. However, wearing a face mask may not be possible in every situation. If you must use a face shield instead of a mask, choose one that wraps around the sides of your face and extends below your chin.

Do you still need to wear a facemask after you're fully vaccinated?

After you're fully vaccinated, the CDC recommends that it's ok not to wear a mask except where required by a rule or law. *However*, if you are in an area with a high number of new COVID-19 cases in the last week, the CDC recommends wearing a mask indoors in public and outdoors in crowded areas or when you are in close contact with unvaccinated people. If you are fully vaccinated and have a condition or are taking medications that weaken your immune system, you may need to keep wearing a mask.

In the U.S., everyone also needs to wear a mask while on planes, buses, trains and other forms of public transportation.



When this shindig started we suddenly found that supply chains for many medical and laboratory supplies were disrupted. This caused us to throw away the term “disposable” for a lot of stuff that was meant to be worn once and, well, thrown away – like masks. It’s important to replace used or soiled PPE whenever it is compromised, or to sanitize the products we reuse, when necessary.

Expect the guidance to change. Variants of concern, levels of local transmission, and a growing base of understanding will shape the way our masks are made, worn, and handled. It is likely that mask wearing will become much more ubiquitous in the future. Our understanding and behaviors must evolve to adjust to this new paradigm.

Have a great week and be safe,

Bryan

