

DO YOUR PART TO SLOW THE SPREAD OF COVID-19: WEAR A FACE COVERING OR MASK



Increasing evidence supports the value of wearing cloth face coverings or masks to prevent the transmission of the virus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19. We know that the primary method of transmission of this virus is by droplets that are produced when coughing, sneezing, talking, yelling or singing and that these droplets travel about six feet before falling to the ground. This is the basis for the physical distancing that is recommended. Physical distancing, however, is not always possible.

We also know that anywhere from 10 to 30% of people who have the virus may not have symptoms and still spread the virus to others. Those who do become symptomatic can still spread the virus in the first few days before symptoms “appear”. So simply avoiding close contact with sick people isn’t enough to prevent the spread of disease. There is also concern that smaller droplets, called aerosols, may be infectious. These are also produced when coughing, sneezing or talking, and can stay in the air longer and travel further. For these reasons, physical distancing isn’t enough by itself. We know that masks or cloth face coverings only provide a small protection for the wearer, but the most important reason to wear them is to prevent YOU from spreading the virus to others. You may have the virus and not know it, and thus could spread it to other people who are nearby, to your family, friends or relatives who don’t live with you but who you visit, and even to your doctors and their staff. Some of those people may be at high risk of severe disease should they catch it.

INFORMATION FOR ALLERGY AND ASTHMA PATIENTS

People with allergies and asthma are more likely to have symptoms that can cause the production of droplets, and so could be of more danger to those around them. Wearing a face covering can help prevent this. An additional benefit from face coverings for patients with asthma and allergies is that they may reduce the exposure to pollens and pollutants that make their symptoms worse. They can also help reduce the risk of catching other viruses that can trigger your asthma.

We know that some people may feel uncomfortable wearing masks and there is concern among patients with nasal allergies and asthma that they wouldn’t be able to breathe

when wearing facial coverings. That is why there are several alternatives for face coverings so you can select one that you are comfortable wearing. As far as breathing with a face covering or mask, it doesn’t require any more effort to breathe through than it does to use some of your asthma inhalers. If you feel like you can’t wear a face covering because of your allergies or asthma, please take the time to discuss this with your allergy/asthma specialist. Perhaps some modification of your rhinitis and asthma treatment is necessary. If your asthma is bad enough that you can’t wear a face covering, perhaps it is best that you stay at home and avoid exposures that could make it worse.

As an alternative for those that have problems wearing face masks, face shields appear to be as effective as masks for wearer protection from the virus, but data currently is lacking on efficacy for controlling transmission of the virus to others. Presumably, they are likely to be effective.

DISPELLING COMMON MYTHS ABOUT FACE MASKS

You may also have heard some statements about adverse effects of wearing masks, such as an increase in infections due to bacteria or fungi in the mask or adverse effects of the higher levels of carbon dioxide in the mask. There is no credible scientific basis to support these claims and many do not make physiologic or even common sense. Washing your masks daily prevents any bacterial or fungal issues. As far as medical and public health experts know, there is no harm in wearing a mask or face covering for most people. There are a few exceptions, which include age, mental health issues and respiratory issues, and these are usually included in the guidelines for face coverings.

CDC: 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>

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