

COVID-19 Face masks for the public

Think of it as a matter of respect

*I'm not sick.
I'm wearing this mask out of respect for you.
I don't want to infect you if I have COVID-19 and don't know it yet.*

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends we wear cloth face coverings when in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain. Many states, including Montana, now mandate wearing face masks when in public settings. The CDC has documented that wearing cloth face masks provide meaningful protection for both the wearer and those around them.

Face masks decrease the likelihood a person with a respiratory disease will spread it to others. This has been shown in a number of studies that span over many years

Wearing any type of mask is no guarantee you won't get COVID-19, it is one part of a prevention program. The others are:

1. Hand washing with soap and water or using hand sanitizer frequently.
2. Avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands.
3. Avoiding close contact—social distancing.
4. Covering your mouth and nose if you cough—like with a face mask.
5. Disinfecting commonly touched surfaces.
6. Staying at home if you have a cold, flu, fever, or new respiratory illness.

Here is a link to the CDC website information on face coverings:

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

Early in the pandemic the CDC recommended against wearing masks due to the scarcity of available face masks, unknowns about their effectiveness, and the fear a public hoarding rush for face masks would make the scarcity of N95 and surgical face masks worse. Since then, numerous published studies have proven the effectiveness of cloth face masks for the public and surgical and N95 masks for emergency providers and healthcare workers :

1. N95 face mask respirators are still scarce due to demand and limited supply.
 - a. These are still not recommended for civilian use.
 - b. N95 surgical face masks are not available for sale to the public and are sold on an allocation when available basis to healthcare workers and agencies.
 - i. This has prevented the hoarding and profiteering seen in the spring of 2020.
2. Multi-layer fabric face masks and other basic face masks have become readily available to the public.
 - a. Research has proven beyond a shadow of doubt that wearing simple and fabric face masks can reduce the risk of transmitting and getting COVID-19.

- b. Research and experience have proven the safety of wearing face masks.
- c. This has eliminated any risk that hoarding will challenge the supply chain.
3. We now know that COVID-19 is spread primarily by exhaled respiratory particles and that face masks are clearly our first line of defense against this illness.

The COVID-19 virus retains its ability to infect when it lands on fabric but will not live on that fabric. It requires living cells to reproduce and stay viable. It persists for 3-7 days on hard surfaces like metal and plastic but loses infectiousness in hours on cardboard. It probably loses infectiousness in a matter of hours on fabric, as it true of other respiratory viruses, but this may vary depending on other conditions: temperature, humidity, sun exposure, and fabric type. Viruses survive in warm moist surfaces. They lose their power to infect when they dry out, and they dry out faster on porous surfaces like fabric. Soaps and detergents kill them just as well as disinfectants.

How and when to wear masks:

1. Wear masks when in public places where social distancing is difficult.
2. Wear masks when riding in a vehicle with non-household contacts.
 - a. Don't bother wearing face masks when you drive alone in your vehicle
 - b. Do wear facemasks when driving shared vehicles. Simply breathing may spread the virus to surfaces within six feet, which in a vehicle is nearly everywhere. Masks reduce this significantly.
3. Wear masks in indoor public places.
 - a. Stores and pharmacies.
 - b. Indoors at the gas station/convenience store.
 - c. Inside the restaurant when you pick up carry-out.
 - d. Inside restaurants while waiting for your food or drink.
 - e. Church.
 - f. Inside emergency and medical services facilities.
4. Don't wear masks at home unless you are sick and others live with you.
5. Don't ask children less than 2 to wear them.

How to clean cloth face masks:

1. Wash them with your clothing at the warmest temperature recommended by the fabrics in the wash. Soap and water are very effective in killing the COVID-19 virus.

Surgical face masks and N95 respirators lose their effectiveness when washed, spraying them with disinfectants may have the same effect and is not recommended.