

COLUMBIA | PREPAREDNESS Fact Sheet 4



In light of new evidence indicating that non-symptomatic transmission of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) is common, Federal Agencies and New York City authorities now recommend that all **persons cover their mouth and nose** when in public spaces. This Fact Sheet will assist essential personnel to follow these recommendations in order to reduce the spread of the virus.

What is asymptomatic transmission?

Individuals infected by SARS-CoV-2 may be unknowingly spreading the virus even without having symptoms like fever, cough, shortness of breath, and without feeling ill. Viral particles may be present in their respiratory secretions, and can become aerosolized and infect other persons or contaminate surfaces.

Why is it recommended to cover your nose and mouth when in public?

A simple cloth mask made of commonly available materials can act as a physical barrier preventing the spread of the droplets of saliva and other fluids that may contain large numbers of viral particles.

What type of face coverings should I be using?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends using:

- multiple layers of cloth
- a material that can be washed and dried at home, and easily reused
- fabric that can be tied or otherwise secured on the head in order to stay in place
- cloth that allows for the wearer to easily breath through it

Why should I avoid wearing surgical masks and N95 respirator masks?

Surgical masks and respirators are needed for use by clinical professionals who regularly interact with infected persons or work in close proximity to confirmed COVID-19 patients. These types of protective equipment are in short supply. At this time, their use is not recommended for the general public, and they should be reserved for use in clinical settings.

Should I be washing my cloth mask?

Yes. Cloth coverings should be washed daily. Simple laundering with hot water and a detergent is sufficient to keep the mask clean and safe to reuse.

Can I make my own mask at home?

Commonly accessible materials, like T-shirts, coffee filters, a bandana etc. can be used to create a covering that covers one's face tightly and comfortably. Instructions on how to make your own mask can be found on the CDC website.

Who should avoid wearing face coverings?

Unsupervised young children, or persons who are unable to remove the mask on their own should not be wearing a mouth and nose covering without supervision.

Should I continue to practice social distancing and good hygiene practices?

A face covering is not a substitute for Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPI) that help minimize the spread of the virus. **Physical distancing**, as well as frequent and thorough washing of hands, and avoiding touching one's face are the most effective practices against the spread of COVID-19. These must be practiced in addition to wearing a face covering.

How to make your own mask at home <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

Additional information available at <https://preparedness.columbia.edu/>