

COVID-19 and Masks

FAQ for Families

In the current COVID-19 pandemic, a common recommendation is for people to wear masks or facial coverings. Here are answers to common questions.

Why should I or my child wear a mask?

There are several benefits to wearing a mask during the current COVID-19 pandemic:

- The more people wear masks, the less the virus is transmitted throughout communities.
- Wearing a mask not only decreases you spreading droplets that can have virus in them into the air, it can also decrease how many of other people's droplets you breathe in.
- By having a mask on your face, it makes it less likely that you will touch your nose and your mouth as often. Touching a surface with virus on it, and then touching your nose and mouth is one way you can catch the virus. Having a mask decreases your risk of catching the virus this way.

Are there dangers to wearing a mask?

Wearing masks are quite safe. Many people normally wear masks all day for their jobs, even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Wearing a mask will not decrease your oxygen levels, or cause increased CO₂ levels.
- Even children with asthma or lung disease can safely wear a mask.
- Children who have significant cognitive or developmental challenges, like Down Syndrome or autism may not be able to get used to wearing a mask. For these situations, parents should consult with their physician on the best thing to do.

If you feel short of breath while wearing a mask, try these things:

- Start off wearing a mask for only a short period of time (10-15 minutes) several times a day. Steadily lengthen the duration of mask wearing over the course of several days as you get used to it, until you can comfortably wear one for several hours.
- Try different styles and sizes of masks. For example, a mask with thicker fabric, or that fits snugly to the face may give you more shortness of breath than a flat, pleated style with thinner fabric.

Can wearing a mask make me sick?

You are less likely to get sick wearing a mask than if you are not wearing a mask. However, if you are using cloth, reusable masks, you should make sure to wash them to keep them clean.

- How often you wash the mask depends on how much you wear it and if you have been sick. If you have been sick, or around people with viral symptoms, the mask should be washed more frequently.
- Wash the mask with a gentle detergent, free of perfumes, scents and dyes so that you do not breathe in any residue left on the mask.
- Rinse the masks extra well after washing, before letting them dry. Let them dry completely before putting them away or wearing them.

What about face shields?

- Face shields are more comfortable for some people to wear for long periods of time compared to masks. Face shields are permitted instead of masks in some situations but not all.
- If you are thinking of using a face shield instead of a mask, first see if it is a permitted alternative in the setting you are going to.
- Keep in mind that face shields are not as protective as a mask, as they do not do as much to stop the spread of droplets between people.