Community advice on when and how to use a face mask

WA Health does not recommend the use of facemasks for the general community (who have no symptoms of respiratory illness), to prevent the risk of contracting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

How do you catch COVID-19?

COVID-19 can be spread from person-to-person. This can happen:

- by having direct contact with a person while they are infectious
- by contact with droplets when an infectious person coughs or sneezes; or
- by touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

What is the best way to protect myself and others against COVID-19?

The best way to protect yourself and others is to practice good hygiene and social distancing by:

- Washing your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds, with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitiser. See the World Health Organisation's guide to hand hygiene [https://www.who.int/gpsc/clean_hands_protection/en/]
- Not shaking hands or making unnecessary physical contact with others
- Trying to stay at least 1.5 metres away from others wherever possible
- Covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Use a flexed elbow or a tissue - if you use a tissue, dispose of it immediately and appropriately.
- Staying home if you're sick. Do not go to work or school.

When to use a mask

Surgical face masks are masks that are flat or pleated (some are like cups). They are attached to the head with straps. Surgical masks are not recommended for the general community to prevent the risk of contracting COVID-19. Healthy people, with no respiratory illness symptoms, only need to wear a mask if caring for a person with or suspected to have COVID-19.

If you have, or are suspected to have, COVID-19, you will need to wear a surgical mask if you cannot avoid being in close contact with others e.g. if you are on self-isolation and need to leave your home to see a GP for medical care.
**Use of face masks**

If you are required to wear a mask it is important to follow the steps below when both putting on the mask and when disposing of it:

- place the mask carefully to cover your mouth and nose and tie it securely to minimise any gaps between the face and the mask
- while in use, avoid touching the front of the mask
- remove the mask by using the ties or straps. Do not touch the front of the mask
- discard single-use face masks in a lined rubbish bin immediately upon removal
- after removing your mask (or if you accidentally touch a used mask) make sure you clean your hands by using an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- replace your face mask with a new mask as soon as it becomes damp/humid. **Never re-use single-use masks.**

Cloth masks (e.g. cotton, gauze and home sewn) are not recommended under any circumstance.

**Remember, masks are only effective when used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.**

For further information see:


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**This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.**

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