Preventing COVID-19: Masks

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Masks are now required in all indoor public places in Los Angeles County.
Some exceptions will apply – see the revised Health Officer Order and the information below.

KEY POINTS

- Community transmission of COVID-19 has increased in LA County. The risk for COVID-19 exposure and infection will continue until more people are vaccinated. It is important for everyone to help slow the spread of the virus by wearing masks indoors.
- If you aren't fully vaccinated, your mask is one of the most powerful tools you have to protect yourself and other unvaccinated people. This is especially true when you are in an indoor or crowded outdoor space.
- If you are fully vaccinated, wearing a mask indoors gives you extra protection from getting infected and it protects other unvaccinated people.
- Real world data continues to show that people who are fully vaccinated[1] are well protected from serious illness and death from COVID-19, including the Delta variant. But it appears that a small number of fully vaccinated persons can get asymptomatic or mild infections and may be able to infect others. This is why even if you are fully vaccinated, you are now required to wear a mask indoors.
- For masks to work properly, they need to completely cover your nose and mouth and fit snugly against the sides of your face and around your nose. Your mask should be made with two or more layers of tightly woven, breathable material. Details, including information on double masking, are below.

* Infants and children under 2 years of age should not wear a mask. Children ages 2 to 8 should wear a mask only when under adult supervision. See Who should not wear a mask and Special considerations for persons with communication difficulties or certain disabilities for other exceptions.

HOW WEARING A MASKCAN SLOW THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

COVID-19 spreads when an infected person breathes out droplets and very small particles that contain the virus. These droplets and particles can then be breathed in by other peopleor land on their eyes, noses, or mouth.

- *Protect others*: wearing a mask over your mouth and nose lowers the number of respiratory droplets and particles that you release into the air when you breathe or talk.
- *Protect yourself*: wearing a mask over your mouth and nose also lowers the numberof respiratory droplets and particles from someone else that get into your nose, mouth, and lungs.

MASK WEARING RULES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Los Angeles County, everyone 2 years of age and older must* wear a mask in all indoor public settings, venues, gatherings, and public and private businesses, regardless of their vaccination status. They must also continue to wear a mask on all public transit and transit hubs, at all health care settings, correctional facilities, shelters and cooling centers, and schools and day care facilities.

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[1] You are considered fully vaccinated against COVID-19 two (2) weeks after: the second dose of a Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine series, a single dose of Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine or you finished the series of a COVID-19 vaccine that has been listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization. See fully vaccinated web page for more information.

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Public Health

Note that in the workplace, workers must follow the most protective mask requirements as stated by Cal/OSHA and the County Health Officer Order. Certain employees may be exempt from wearing a mask in specific situations provided alternative safety measures are in place. See the Health Officer Order and Best Practices for Businesses webpage for details of workplace requirements.

EVERYONE*, regardless of vaccination status, <u>must</u> wear a mask:
• **In all public settings, venues, gatherings, and public and private businesses in Los Angeles County** • On planes, trains, buses, ferries, taxis and ride-shares, and all other forms of public transport • In transportation hubs like airports, bus terminals, train stations, marinas, seaports or other ports, subway stations, or any other area that provides transportation. • In healthcare settings (including long-term care facilities) • In state and local correctional facilities and detention centers • Shelters and cooling centers • Indoors at any youth-serving facility (such as K-12 schools, childcare, day camps, etc.) • At outdoor Mega-Events (events with over 10,000 attendees like concerts, sports games and parades) (Effective 8/19 11.59pm) • In any other outdoor location where it is the policy of the business or venue
Recommendations
• It is *strongly recommended* that you wear a mask at private indoor social gatherings with people outside your household, unless everyone at the gathering is fully vaccinated. • It is *strongly recommended* that you wear a mask at crowded outdoor events (that are smaller than Mega Events). In particular, wear a mask while in line to enter, exit, use the bathroom, or buy food or drinks. • If you are not fully vaccinated, *it is strongly recommended* that you wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings. • If you are in a setting where you are in sustained close contact with other people who may not be fully vaccinated, consider wearing a higher level of protection, such as wearing two masks (double masking) or an N95 respirator. This is especially important if you are not fullyvaccinated and are in an indoor or crowded outdoor setting.

Note: You are allowed to take off your mask while you are:
- Actively eating or drinking as long as you are sitting or standing in a specific place such as a table, counter, or ticketed seat. This means that you can briefly remove your mask when you are actually eating or drinking but you must put it back on immediately afterwards. You must also wear a mask when you are waiting to be served, between courses or drinks, and while seated after finishing your food or drink.
- Alone in a separate room or office.
- Showering or swimming.
- Performing or receiving personal hygiene or personal care services (like a facial or shave) that cannot be done without removing your mask.

* There are some people who should not wear a mask, such as children younger than 2, people with certain medical conditions or disabilities, and people instructed by their medical provider not to wear a mask. Children ages 2 to 8 should wear a mask only when under adult supervision. See Who should not wear a mask and Special considerations for persons with communication difficulties or certain disabilities.

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/
Masks   Revised 8/18/21

Page 2

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Public Health

<div style="background-color: #F5A623">**WHAT KIND OF MASK SHOULD I WEAR?**</div>

There are many types of masks you can use to protect against getting andspreading COVID-19. Choose a mask:
1. That fits snugly against your nose and chin with no large gapsaround the sides of the face, AND
2. That has two or more layers, AND
3. That you will be comfortable wearing.

Another thing to consider when choosing what mask to wear is how much protection you need. If you will be in a placewhere COVID-19 spreads more easily you should wear your most protective mask, especially if you are not fully vaccinated. You get more protection from a mask the tighter it fits (seals around your face) and more it filters the air.

Examples of how you can get better protection include if you:
- Improve how well your mask fits and filters by double masking (i.e., wearing a cloth face mask over a surgicalmask).
- Use an N95 respirator, as long as it fits well, and you can tolerate it.

See CDC's Guidance for Unvaccinated People — Choosing a Mask for Different Situations and CDPH's Get the Most Out of Masking page.

<div style="background-color: #F5A623">**TYPES OF MASKS**</div>

Cloth masks
- Are washable and re-usable.
- They should have at least two or three layers of washable tightly woven, breathable fabric or two layers with apocket for a filter.
- To see if the fabric is tightly woven, see if it blocks light when it is held up to a bright light source.
    - For extra protection, a cloth mask can be worn OVER a disposable mask (see *Double masking*).

Surgical masks
Also called medical procedure, dental masks or disposable masks. Some surgical masks thatare intended for medical use are regulated by the FDA.
- Look for a mask that has multiple layers of non-woven material and a nose wire.
- Be aware that there are surgical-style masks that may look the same as true medical procedure or surgical masks but may not work as well.
    - Tip: One sign that a mask if not a real surgical mask is if you put a drop of wateron it (the front side of the mask) and it soaks into the mask instead of formingbeads on the surface.
- Throw the mask away if it is wet/or dirty or after a day of use, whichever comes first.
    - For extra protection, a surgical mask can be worn UNDER a cloth mask (see *Double masking*).

N95 and KN95 Respirators
These are types of disposable respirator that are designed to filter at least 95% of airborne particles. NIOSH-approved N95 respirators are recommended over KN95s.
- **N95 Respirators** are regulated by both the FDA (if marketed for medical purposes)and the CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Earlyin the pandemic, N95s were reserved for healthcare workers, but now there are enough for the public to use them too. Cal/OSHA requires that workers who wearN95s are 'fit tested' to find the right model, style, and

size of N95. See FDA N95 Respirators for more information.

- **KN95 Respirators** are made in China and are similar to N95s but are made to meetChinese standards. KN95s are not regulated by NIOSH and may not filter as effectively. Be aware that about 60% ofKN95s sold in the US are fake.

N95 and KN95 respirators that fit well and provide a tight seal on your face protect you better than a cloth mask on its own or a surgical mask. They may be less comfortable because they filter better. Be aware that there are many counterfeit (fake) N95 or KN95 respirators.

- N95/KN95s will only provide full protection if they form a tight seal on your face:
  - Find the right size, style, and model. Respirators with straps that go around the back of the headprovide a better seal than those with ear loops.
  - Check the seal each time you put one on (NIOSH-approved N95 respirators include instructions onhow to do a seal check).
- N95/KN95s are not recommended for people with facial hair or for small children because they cannotachieve a proper fit.
- People with breathing difficulties should check with their doctor before wearing a respirator.
- Do not wear an N95/KN95 with another mask (i.e., do not double mask).
- N95/KN95s are designed for one-time use. They should be thrown away once they become wet or dirtyOR after a day of use, whichever comes first.
- Beware of counterfeit (fake) respirators as they may not be able to provide the promised protection.
  - NIOSH tips for warning signs of websites selling fake products and fake standard or approval markings (includes useful photos).
  - CDC Factors to Consider When Planning to Purchase Respirators from Another Country.

Do not use masks that:

- Are made of loosely woven fabrics.
- Are made of a fabric that is hard to breathe through such as vinyl, leather, or plastic.
- Have valves, vents, or holes

Bandanas and scarves are not recommended (unless you wear a mask

underneath).See CDC Types of Masks for more information.

TIPS! It is recommended to have more than one mask readily available so that a dirty face covering can be easily replaced with a clean one. When you are out, carry a spare mask and hand sanitizer. If your mask gets damp or wet, replace it with a clean dry one.

HOW TO WEAR A MASK PROPERLY

To get the best protection from your mask, make sure that it fits well. It is important that whichever type of mask youuse:

- It completely covers your nose and mouth.
- It fits snugly against the nose, sides of your face and chin and doesn't leave a gap.

Fold and tuck in unneeded material.

Ways to make your cloth or surgical mask fit better

- For children, use a smaller mask that fits them well.
- Wear a mask with nose wires. This is especially helpful if you wear glasses.
- Knot the ear loops close to the edge of the mask and tuck the excess material so there is no gap. See video in this section of the

ph.lacounty.gov/masks webpage.

- Use a mask fitter or brace—these devices are worn over a cloth or surgicalmask to reduce the leakage around the edges.

Certain types of facial hair, like beards, can make mask fitting difficult. People withbeards can trim them, use a mask fitter/brace or double mask.

Tips to check that your mask fits
- Check for gaps by cupping your hands around the outside edges of the mask and feel for any air leakages. Makesure no air is flowing from the area near your eyes or from the sides of the mask.
- If the mask has a good fit, you will feel warm air come through the front of the mask and may be able to seethe mask material move in and out with each breath.
- Make sure you can still breathe comfortably and that your vision is not obstructed.
- If you have to continually adjust your mask, it might not fit properly. Consider trying different types or sizes ofmasks.

Wearing two masks or "double masking"
"Double masking" is when a cloth mask worn on top of a surgical mask. This makesthe surgical mask fit better and adds extra layer(s) of protection.
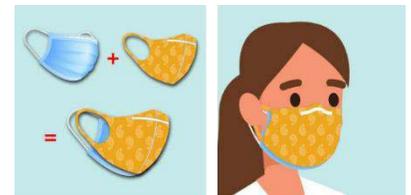
Important note:
- Double masking does not work with two surgical masks because they aretoo loose.
- Respirators (e.g., N95 or KN95 masks), should not be worn with a second mask.
- If you try double masking or other ways to improve the fit of your mask, make sure you can still breathecomfortably, and your vision is not obstructed. Test it out at home first.

See CDC Improve the Fit and Filtration of Your Mask to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19 for more information.

HOW TO PUT A MASK ON AND TAKE IT OFF

How to put on a mask
- Clean your hands before putting the mask on.
- Make sure that it fits correctly (see above).
- Make sure you can breathe comfortably.
- Once you have been wearing the mask around others, try to avoid touching the mask. If you touch any part ofthe mask other than the ear loops/ties, you should clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer.

How to take off a mask
- Remove the mask by handling the ear loops or ties. Do not touch the outside of the mask. It is consideredcontaminated until you wash it.
  - *For masks with ear loops*: Hold both of the ear loops and lift and remove the mask.
  - *For masks with ties*: Untie the bottom string first, then untie the top string and pull the mask awayfrom you.
- Cloth mask - put in a bag or bin for laundering.
- Surgical mask or respirator (e.g., N95 or KN95) - throw away once it gets wet or visibly dirty or after a day ofwearing it (whichever comes first).
- Clean your hands.

Removing your mask temporarily (e.g., to eat or drink)

- Remove your mask (as above).
- Fold it in half so the outside corners touch.
- Put it in a clean, dry bag.
- When you put it back on, follow the instructions above and make sure that the same side is facing out.
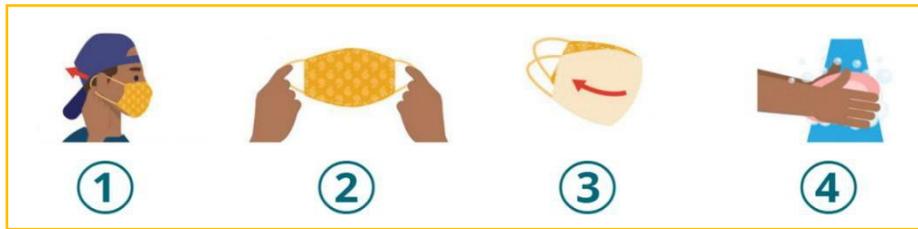
LOOKING AFTER YOUR MASK

Cloth masks
- Place a wet or visibly dirty cloth mask in a sealed plastic bag until you can wash it. Wash it as soon as possibleto prevent mold or mildew.
- Place dry cloth face masks in a bag or bin until they can be washed.
- Wash your mask after each use.
  - Wash according to the fabric label. You can wash your masks in a washer with your regular laundryusing regular laundry detergent.
  - If washing by hand, wash with warm tap water and laundry detergent or soap. Rinse with water.
- Dry your face mask **completely** either in a dryer or by air drying.

Surgical masks and respirators (e.g., N95 and KN95 masks)
Throw the mask away once it gets wet or visibly dirty or after a day of wearing it (whichever comes first).

WHO SHOULD NOT WEAR A MASK

The following people should not wear a mask:
- **Children under age 2**. Most children ages 2 to 8 can safely wear a mask with adult supervision.
- **People who are cannot safely wear a mask**, such as someone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or who is unable to remove a mask without help.
- **Workers in situations where a mask would create a risk to workplace health, safety, or job duty** as determined by a workplace risk assessment (see osha.gov/safety-management).
- **Anyone instructed not to wear a mask by their medical provider.** If their job involves regular contact with others, they must wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape that is form fitting underthe chin (see Face Shields), as long as their medical condition permits it.

Note: Underlying medical conditions
Most people with underlying medical conditions, including those with asthma can and should wear a mask, unless instructed not to by their doctor. Wearing a mask does not reduce a person's oxygen supply or cause a build-up of carbon dioxide. If you or someone you care for has an underlying health condition and you have concerns about wearing a mask, talk to your doctor. They will discuss the benefits and potential risks with you.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERSONS WITH COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES OR CERTAIN DISABILITIES

Clear masks or cloth masks with a clear plastic panel are an alternative type of mask for people who interact with:

- People who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Children or students learning to read.
- People learning a new language.
- People with disabilities. These masks make communication easier. They can be homemade, or store bought. Follow the information in How to wear a mask properly to make sure that they fit well.

Appropriate and consistent use of masks may be challenging for some children and for people of any age with certain disabilities, including cognitive, intellectual, developmental, sensory, and behavioral disorders. If you are caring for children and people with certain disabilities, ask their doctor for advice about wearing a mask.

FACE SHIELDS

A face shield is a transparent barrier that covers the face and is typically open at the sides and bottom. Face shields are often worn by healthcare workers in addition to medical masks, to protect their eyes from splashes and sprays of body fluids.

A face shield alone cannot be used in place of a mask.

Face shields with a drape
Although they may not work as well as masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19, a face shield with a drape attached on the bottom edge that is either form fitting under the chin or tucked into a shirt or collar can be used by people who cannot wear a mask due to a disability or medical condition. For more information on face shields plus drape including a photograph see the CDPH Face Shield Frequently Asked Questions.

Do NOT put a plastic face shield on newborns or infants.

MORE INFORMATION

CDPH – Get the Most Out of Masking

From the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):
- Your Guide to Masks
- Types of Masks
- Improve the Fit and Filtration of Your Mask to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19
- Considerations for Wearing Masks