

COVID-19 Update

We continue to monitor COVID-19 in our area. If there are changes in surgeries or other scheduled appointments, your provider will notify you. We continue to provide in-person care and telemedicine appointments.

Learn about our [expanded patient care options](#)

(<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/for-johns-hopkins-patients.html>) and [visitor guidelines](#) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/visitor-guidelines.html>).

[General Information](#) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/index.html>) | [Self-Checker](#) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/covid-19-self-checker.html>) | [Donate and Lend Support](#) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/giving.html>) | [Staff Appreciation](#) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/extraordinary-people/index.html>) | [Get Email Alerts](#) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/newsletter>).

Health

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Coronavirus Face Masks & Protection FAQs

Reviewed By:

[Lisa Lockerd Maragakis, M.D., M.P.H.](#) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/profiles/results/directory/profile/0009313/lisa-maragakis>).

While researchers continue to learn more about the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, it is extremely important to maintain safety measures until a vaccine is ready. Wearing a face mask is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of the virus. Other important measures are practicing [physical distancing](#) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-social-distancing-and-self-quarantine>) and washing your hands frequently with soap and water or using hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

[Lisa Maragakis, M.D., M.P.H.](#)

(<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/profiles/results/directory/profile/0009313/lisa-maragakis>), an expert in infection prevention, answers questions about face masks.

Should I wear a face mask or covering for coronavirus protection?

Yes, if you are in a public place where you will encounter other people, you should wear a mask. Face masks help contain respiratory droplets that can transmit SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, from people who do not know they have the virus.

For example, when inside an office, store, restaurant or school, or when on public transportation, you should wear a mask. The only exceptions are times when you are alone or with your family, such as if you are in your office with the door closed or in your car.

When you are outdoors walking or exercising near others, it is also important to wear a mask.

At Johns Hopkins Medicine, we currently require everyone entering our facilities to wear a mask, except for children under age 2.

Can wearing a face mask prevent coronavirus from spreading?

Yes, face masks help prevent the spread of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. If you are infected with the coronavirus and do not know it, a mask is very good at keeping your respiratory droplets and particles from infecting others. A mask can also be somewhat effective in preventing germs from getting into your nose and mouth that come from another person's respiratory droplets.

Some people who have COVID-19 only experience mild symptoms or none at all, and they can spread the coronavirus to others before they realize they have it. They may think they have allergies, a cold or the flu. (It's initially hard to tell the [difference between COVID-19 and the flu](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-disease-2019-vs-the-flu) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-disease-2019-vs-the-flu>) without a test.) The coronavirus can spread through droplets and particles released into the air by speaking, singing, coughing or sneezing — that is why masks are now required or recommended in most indoor public places.

Wearing a mask is especially important to protect people around you who have [risk factors](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-covid19-who-is-at-higher-risk) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-covid19-who-is-at-higher-risk>) for severe consequences of COVID-19. These include people over age 65 and those living with heart disease, diabetes, obesity, chronic lung disease, immunity problems or cancer.

What's the right way to wear a face mask?

Your mask should cover your face from the bridge of your nose to under your chin. It should be loose fitting but secure enough to stay in place. Make sure you can talk with your mask on and that it doesn't irritate you, so you are not tempted to touch it or pull it out of place, which could limit its effectiveness or put you at risk from touching your face.

[Learn more about how to properly wear a face mask](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/proper-mask-wearing-coronavirus-prevention-infographic)

(<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/proper-mask-wearing-coronavirus-prevention-infographic>).

COVID-19: When should masks be worn?

Infectious disease expert Lisa Maragakis explains the importance of wearing a face mask to help prevent COVID-19.

How effective are neck gaiters and bandanas in stopping the spread of the coronavirus? Are masks with valves OK?

None of these three types of face coverings works as well as a proper face mask. A good mask has a double layer of washable, breathable fabric that helps keep the wearer from spreading potentially infected droplets into the air. A bandanna tied around the face does not work as well as a mask because it is open at the bottom. A gaiter (a tube of thin, stretchy knit fabric that can be worn around the neck and pulled up to cover the nose and mouth) is usually too thin to provide adequate protection. Likewise, masks with exhalation valves can allow your droplets to escape into the air.

Johns Hopkins Medicine does not permit bandanas, gaiters, or masks with exhalation valves to be worn by patients, staff members or visitors at our locations.

What type of face mask should I buy?

Look for a mask made with at least two layers of fabric. It should cover your nose and mouth without large gaps. The mask should have ear loops or ties so you can adjust it. For people who wear glasses, look for a mask with a bendable border at the top so you can mold the mask to fit the bridge of your nose and prevent your glasses from fogging. Professional masks should be reserved for health care workers caring for patients on the front lines.

[Learn how to care for your face mask.](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-how-to-care-for-your-face-mask) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-how-to-care-for-your-face-mask>).

Can I make my own cloth mask?

Yes. Johns Hopkins Medicine offers directions for making a [homemade adult mask](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/_documents/INF2003076_VW_Hand-Sewn_Mask_instructions-1.pdf)

(https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/_documents/INF2003076_VW_Hand-Sewn_Mask_instructions-1.pdf) and a [child-size mask](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/_documents/Child-Size-Mask-Instructions.pdf)

(https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus/_documents/Child-Size-Mask-Instructions.pdf) for use in non-patient-care settings. Masks can be made out of cotton or linen fabric. Cloth masks can and should be washed daily.

What items in my closet can I use to create a face mask?

- Thick, densely woven cotton fabrics are best, such as quilting cotton or cotton sheets.
- Stretchy knits aren't ideal. Hold the fabric up to the light — the fewer tiny holes you can see, the better it will work to filter your droplets.
- Overall, making a good mask involves finding a balance. You want fabric that doesn't allow droplets to pass through, while ensuring you can breathe properly with your mask in place.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Email Alerts

Sign up to receive coronavirus (COVID-19) email updates from Johns Hopkins Medicine.

What is a face shield?

A face shield is a piece of rigid, clear plastic attached to a headband. The plastic piece covers the face, extending to below the chin.

You might have seen face shields on some health care providers, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Dentists and dental hygienists sometimes wear them when working close to patients' mouths. Doctors, nurses and technologists might use face shields, together with face masks, when performing procedures that could propel blood or other substances into the air.

At Johns Hopkins, care teams when treating patients wear face shields over masks or N95 respirators for additional protection.

Should I wear a face shield?

In general, if you wear a mask and maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet between you and other people when in public places, you do not need a face shield. Wearing a mask will help contain your respiratory droplets. Avoid close contact with anyone who is not wearing a mask. If you must be in close contact with someone not wearing a mask, a face shield or other type of eye protection may provide some additional protection from virus transmission.

Can I get a face mask exemption or waiver?

No, you cannot get a waiver or exemption from wearing a face mask. Recently, fake cards and flyers claiming the bearer is exempt from mask-wearing regulations have shown up in some areas. They claim the person carrying them has a physical or mental condition covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that makes them unable to wear a [face mask or covering](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-face-masks-what-you-need-to-know) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-face-masks-what-you-need-to-know>).

The United States Department of Justice issued a [statement about these fake mask exemptions](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.orghttps://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-warns-inaccurate-flyers-and-postings-regarding-use-face-masks-and) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.orghttps://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-warns-inaccurate-flyers-and-postings-regarding-use-face-masks-and>), explaining that the cards and flyers are fraudulent.

Masks weren't recommended early in the coronavirus pandemic. Why did that change?

At first, researchers and scientists did not know how necessary mask wearing would be among the general public. Now we are aware that wearing masks is an effective way to help prevent spread of this coronavirus. Also, masks were initially in short supply, and it made sense to ensure that those at the highest risk of infection, such as medical caregivers and first responders, had an adequate supply of professional masks so they could protect themselves as they cared for patients.

When a completely new virus like SARS-CoV-2 shows up in humans, recommendations change frequently as we learn more about how the virus behaves.

What masks should COVID-19 patients and their caregivers wear?

People with COVID-19 should self-isolate, and they should wear a surgical or cloth mask when they cannot avoid being around others. If a person who is ill is unable to wear a mask, the caregiver should wear eye protection (along with a mask).

Patients being treated in hospital settings will follow hospital guidelines.

How Johns Hopkins Medicine Keeps Patients Safe

As our communities begin to reopen, we want you to know how Johns Hopkins Medicine is taking measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

What are the different types of face masks?

Cloth or Paper Masks

These masks help slow the spread of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 and help keep people who unknowingly have the virus from transmitting it to others. Thick, densely woven cottons are good materials for cloth masks.

Procedural and Surgical Masks

These are loose-fitting masks designed to cover the mouth and nose.

Do surgical masks protect against the coronavirus?

Although they are not close fitting, blue disposable masks are fluid resistant and provide some protection from larger respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes. Primarily, they help prevent the wearer from spreading infectious droplets to others. Like N95 respirators, these masks are used by health care workers whose safety depends on an adequate supply. They cannot be washed.

Professional Respirators

Called N95 respirators, these medical devices help prevent exposure to tiny droplets that can be suspended in the air. Health care workers who wear them undergo a fit-test to find the right make, model and size to ensure a tight seal. N95 respirators should be reserved for health care providers and first responders.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

What you need to know from Johns Hopkins Medicine.

Updated: October 16, 2020

Related

[Patient Safety Infographic](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/patient-safety-infographic)

(<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/patient-safety-infographic>).

[Halloween Tips for Safe Fun During the Coronavirus Pandemic](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/halloween-tips-for-safe-fun-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic)

(<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/halloween-tips-for-safe-fun-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>).

[Coronavirus Symptoms: Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-symptoms-frequently-asked-questions)

(<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-symptoms-frequently-asked-questions>).

Related Topics

[Infectious Diseases](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/infectious-diseases) (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/infectious-diseases>)

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