

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

Guidance for Cloth Face Coverings

This document provides public health information for members of the general public who choose to use cloth face coverings when they need to leave their home for a short period of time to obtain essential goods or services. It is not an order or recommendation that cloth face coverings be worn by the general public. And it is not a substitute for existing guidance about social (physical) distancing and frequent handwashing.

Our best community and individual defense against COVID-19 is washing our hands frequently, avoiding touching our eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands, avoiding being around sick people and practicing physical distancing, especially by staying at home. Face coverings are not a replacement for these other evidence-based measures; they are just an additional tool that may be used to protect us from exposure to COVID-19 when used properly.

Cloth face coverings are not intended for use in healthcare or other occupational settings.

What is a cloth face covering?

A cloth face covering is a material that covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with ties or straps or simply wrapped around the lower face. It can be made of a variety of materials, such as cotton, silk, or linen. A cloth face covering may be factory-made or sewn by hand or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels.

Why wear a face cover?

Recent information has indicated that covering your nose and mouth can slow the spread of COVID-19 because:

- Individuals can be contagious before the onset of symptoms. You may be contagious and do not know it. If you have covered your nose and mouth, it can limit the spread of COVID-19.
- We touch our face less when our face is covered. Touching your face after touching something contaminated with COVID-19 increases your chances of getting sick with COVID-19.

How well do cloth face coverings work to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

There is limited evidence to suggest that the use of cloth face coverings by the public during a pandemic could help reduce disease transmission. Their primary role is to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air when someone speaks, coughs, or sneezes, including someone who has COVID-19 but feels well. Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing and washing hands and staying home when ill, but they may be helpful when combined with these primary interventions.

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Why might I cover my face now, when a face covering was not recommended before?

The face covering was not previously recommended for the general public for protection from getting COVID-19. We are learning that individuals may be contagious and spread COVID-19 without their knowledge, even if they do not have symptoms. This new information suggests that a face cover may protect others from infection. Wearing a face cover may help prevent the spread of droplets that might be infectious.

When should I wear a cloth face covering?

You may choose to wear a cloth face covering over your nose and mouth when you must be in public for essential activities, such as shopping at the grocery store. Wearing a cloth face covering does not eliminate the need to physically distance yourself from others and to wash your hands frequently.

What are my face covering options?

Acceptable, reusable face covering options for the general public include:

- Bandana
- Neck gaiter
- Homemade face covering
- Scarf
- Tightly woven fabric, such as cotton t-shirts and some types of towels

Can I use an N95 respirator or surgical mask instead?

Purchasing a respirator or face mask intended for the healthcare setting (including N95 respirators and surgical masks) is strongly discouraged. Medical respirators and face masks are worn for protection by healthcare staff and those workers who provide care to a person who might have COVID-19. In contrast, the face covering recommended for the general public is intended to prevent COVID-19 transmission to others by someone who might not know they are infected. Since the intent of the face cover is to primarily protect others rather than the person wearing the cover, a medical face mask is not necessary. Medical respirators and face masks are in short supply and will be increasingly needed to safely provide care for persons with COVID-19, it is critical that these medical items not be used outside of the healthcare setting.

Is a face cover required?

No. Wearing a face cover is not required when in public. However, it is an additional tool that individuals can use to help slow the spread of COVID-19 but does not replace other social distancing requirements.

How should I care for a cloth face covering?

It's a good idea to wash your cloth face covering frequently, ideally after each use, or at least daily. Have a bag or bin to store cloth face coverings until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. If you must re-wear your cloth face covering before washing, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. Discard cloth face coverings that:

- No longer cover the nose and mouth
- Have stretched out or damaged ties or straps
- Cannot stay on the face
- Have holes or tears in the fabric

