Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
Community advice on when & 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?

It is likely COVID-19 is spread from person-to-person through:

* direct contact with a person while they are infectious
* contact with droplets when a person with the infection coughs or sneezes
* touching objects or surfaces that are contaminated by droplets or secretions from an infected person.

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 by:

* Washing your hands frequently (for at least 20 seconds) with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand gel. This will kill the virus if it is on your hands.
* Refraining from touching your mouth and nose.
* Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of the tissue immediately into a rubbish bin and clean your hands as described above. By doing this you are less likely to contaminate objects or people that you touch.
* Avoiding close contact (maintain a distance of at least 1 metre) with anyone if you or they have cold or flu-like symptoms.

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 or gauze) 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:

https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks

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

health.wa.gov.au