



# 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/](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:

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

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