Learning About How to Wear a Mask

What's a mask, and why wear one?

Wearing a mask is an easy way to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. The virus spreads mainly through droplets that escape when you breathe, talk, cough, or sneeze. A mask blocks the droplets. Wearing a mask protects both you and others.

A mask should cover your nose and mouth without gaps at the sides. It should have several layers and a nose wire. You should be breathing **through** it, not **around** it.

Respirators, including high-quality N95 masks, have the highest level of protection. If you can, choose these in higher risk situations. For example, use them if you're:

- At risk for serious illness from COVID-19.
- Caring for someone with COVID-19.
- Not up to date on your COVID-19 vaccinations.

Surgical masks and KN95 masks usually have the next-best protection.

If you choose a cloth mask, make sure it has a few layers of tightly-woven, breathable fabric. It should have a nose wire and should block light when held up to a bright light.

Avoid masks with valves. Most of them don't prevent the spread of COVID-19. They filter out dust you breathe in, but they don't filter germs you breathe out.

Wear a mask with the best fit, protection, and comfort for you. This might be especially important if you:

- Have certain health conditions.
- Live with someone who has a compromised immune system.
- Live with someone who is not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines.

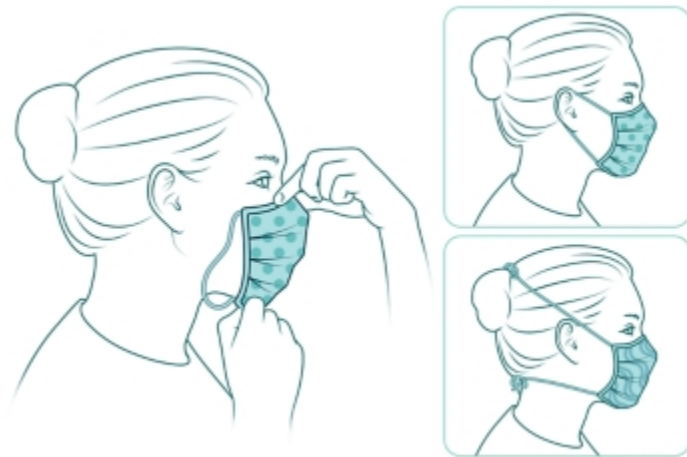# How do you wear one properly?

Wash your hands.

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Wash your hands well with soap and water. Scrub for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
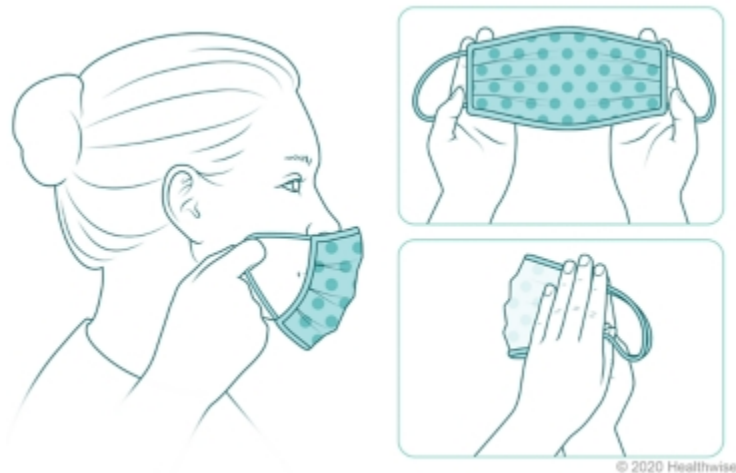
Put the mask on.

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Cover your nose and mouth with the mask. Secure it under your chin. Get a snug fit on both sides of your face. Loop it around your ears or tie it behind your head. Make sure you can breathe easily. If you wear glasses, put them on over the top of the mask at the bridge of your nose. This will help prevent fogging.

Take the mask off.

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Untie the strings behind your head, or unloop the mask from your ears. Handle it only by the loops or ties. Fold the outside corners together. The outside of the mask is now folded in on itself.

Wash the mask or throw it away.

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If the mask is washable, throw it in the washing machine and wash it in the warmest water possible for the type of cloth. If the mask is disposable, throw it in the trash. Then wash your hands with soap and water.

Where can you learn more?

Go to https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd

Enter **A139** in the search box to learn more about **"Learning About How to Wear a Mask"**.