STAY WELL THIS WINTER

Face masks, what to wear and how to wear them

Prevention is the best protection

Wearing a well-fitted mask can help protect you and those around you who may be at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19 or flu. Masks can stop viruses spreading in the air when you breathe, talk, cough, sneeze and laugh, which lowers your chance of spreading or catching the virus.

Masks are very effective at reducing COVID-19 transmission, especially high-quality masks and respirators like N95 and P2. The more people who wear masks the less virus transmission happens, and the fewer people who will get sick with COVID-19.

Wearing a cloth mask more than halves your risk of COVID infection. If you wear a surgical mask you reduce your risk of infection by two thirds (66%), and a N95/KN95 by over 83%.

When face masks are recommended

Mask wearing is strongly recommended this winter if you are indoors in a public space or outside in a crowded place where you can't physically distance. People who are at-risk of severe COVID-19 illness are encouraged to wear a mask whenever out in public.

Which face masks are recommended

Different types of masks provide different levels of protection. Wear the most protective mask you can. Make sure that it fits well and that there are no air gaps on the side.
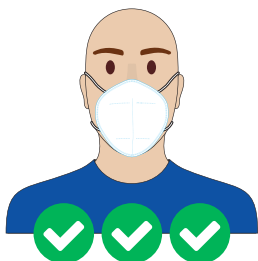
Respirators (also called **N95** or **P2**) are specialised filtering masks and provide the best protection when correctly fitted. Check your mask is TGA or NIOSH approved.
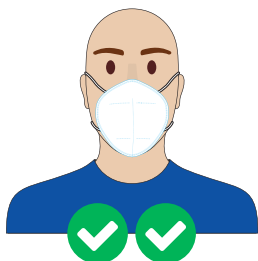
KN95 masks are high filtering masks but are not as well fitted as a respirator. The ear loops do not achieve a good seal between the mask and face.
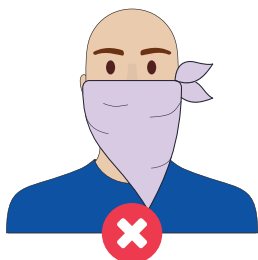
Surgical (or medical masks) also provide good protection when worn correctly. They must fit snuggly over your nose, mouth and chin.
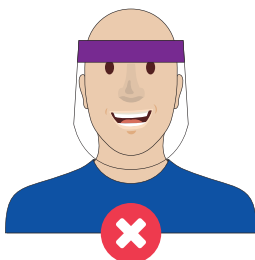
A reusable three layered **cloth mask** can also provide protection. Masks should be made of tightly woven fabric and be machine washed after every use.
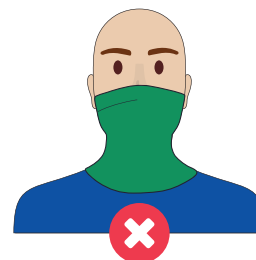
Which masks are not recommended

A bandana

A face shield on its own

A snood or gaiter

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Children and masks

School-aged children can safely wear masks and are strongly encouraged to wear them indoors in a public space or outside in a crowded place where they can't physically distance.

Children aged 2 years or younger should not wear a mask, because it is a choking and suffocation risk.

Children aged 8 and over must wear a mask on public transport, taxis, ride shares, in sensitive setting such as hospitals and care facilities, and if they are a close contact in an indoor space outside the home.

Children aged 12 years and over must also wear a mask on an aircraft.

Reasons for not wearing a mask

Anyone who has a physical or mental health condition or disability that makes wearing a face covering unsuitable, including persons with obstructed breathing, a serious skin condition of the face, an intellectual disability, a mental health condition or persons who have experienced trauma can choose not to wear a mask, even in mandatory settings.

How to safely put on and take off a face mask

- Wash your hands before touching the mask.
- The mask should comfortably and snugly cover your mouth, nose and chin.
- Adjust the mask so there are no air gaps on the side.
- Avoid touching the mask while it is on.
- Replace the masks when it gets wet, or dirty., or when the straps are stretched out so that the mask no longer fits snugly against your face. **Dispose into waste bin after use**.
- Wash your hands after removing the mask.

More information on face masks

More information about when to wear a face mark is available on the coronavirus website **coronavirus.vic.gov.au/face-masks** or call the coronavirus hotline on **1800 675 398**.

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