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Face masks: How are they different?

Physical distancing, hand washing and staying at home if you are sick are the most effective ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Masks do not replace these actions but when worn properly offer protection. Masks are particularly important in indoor settings and when you are not able to keep a two metre distance from others. For work settings, refer to specific workplace guidance on masks.

Cloth masks (homemade or bought)

- May be used by the public to reduce the spread of large respiratory droplets
- Can be made from various types of machine-washable and dryable cloth. Should be constructed with three layers
- If homemade, use clean woven cotton or linen (for example a tea towel, bedsheet, pillowcase or t-shirt)
- Must be designed and worn to fully cover nose and mouth
- Should fit snugly, let you breathe easily, and attached securely with ties or ear loops
- Re-usable and need to be washed regularly
- A bandana, neck gaiter or scarf do not offer the same protection

Face and mouth shields

- Face shields do not replace non-medical masks and are not recommended as a substitute
- They may block some droplets or spray but should be worn with a mask underneath for full protection
- Non-medical clear masks are an option when visual communication is necessary but they have not been assessed for effectiveness
- Mouth shields offer even less protection than face shields

Industrial N95 respirators

- Used to protect workers from inhaling dust, fumes, and hazardous aerosols
- Available in hardware stores
- These masks are not recommended to prevent COVID-19 because if they have a valve and you cough or sneeze, you may spread a stream of germs through the valve

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Medical/surgical masks

- Required for patients, clients, staff and visitors in healthcare settings
- Protect against large droplets
- Flat, pleated or cup shaped with a looser fit
- Water resistant; and may come with visor
- Meant for one-time use

Medical N95 respirators

- Used by healthcare workers for specific procedures. Not for use by the general public
- Protect against inhaling and exhaling very fine droplets
- Fits closely over the nose and mouth to form a tight seal
- Must be custom fit and worn properly

Learn more at **www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/masks**   January 25, 2021