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What type of mask should I be wearing?

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COVID, particularly the new variant Omicron, spreads very easily from person to person.

When a person with COVID breathes, coughs, sneezes, sings, shouts or talks, they release different-sized particles into the air. If those particles come into direct contact with another person's nose, mouth or eyes, that person can become infected with the COVID virus. The large particles fall to the ground within seconds or minutes, but the smaller particles stay in the air for longer, especially indoors and in spaces with poor airflow.
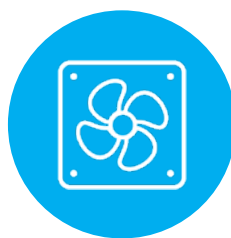
To reduce your risk of getting and spreading COVID:

Get vaccinated.   **Wear a mask.**   **Breath fresh or filtered air when you can.**   **Stay at least two metres apart from people.**   **Wash your hands often.**

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Wearing a well-made mask that fits close to your face, covering both your nose and mouth, is an important way to protect you and those around you. **Masks only work if we wear them properly!**

How to wear a face mask correctly

What types of masks are available?

There are three kinds:

1. **Non-medical cloth masks:** Try to find one with 3 layers — two layers of tightly woven breathable fabric like cotton and a third layer in the middle that works as a filter and is made of a non-woven polypropylene fabric. There are no standards for non-medical masks in Canada at this time.

2. **Medical masks:** Medical masks sold in Canada must meet standards for filtration, breathability and fluid resistance.

3. **Respirators:** These include N95, KN95 and KF94 masks. Respirators sold in Canada must meet standards for filtration, breathability and fluid resistance. Respirators can be fit-tested to make sure they provide a good seal.

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How do I choose what type of mask to wear?

There are several questions you should consider when choosing a mask:

01 / How well does the mask filter COVID viral particles?

That depends on what the mask is made of and on how snugly it fits to your face.

» **Cloth masks** do not always provide good filtration. If you choose to wear one, make sure it has three layers.
» **Medical masks** do a good job of filtering virus particles.
» **Respirator-type masks** provide the best filtration. Even a respirator that has not been specifically fitted to your face provides high quality protection outside of healthcare settings.

02 / How well does the mask fit me?

Your mask should fit snugly, create a tight seal between your face and mask and cover your nose, mouth and chin. It should stay put when you move. If air can get in or out of the edge of your mask, it is not fitting properly or giving the best protection.

» **Cloth masks** often don't provide a tight enough seal around the face.
» **Medical masks** provide a snug fit.
» **Respirator-type masks** provide the best fit.

For tips on how to improve the fit of your mask, visit: **https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/covid-19-mask-fit-properly.html**

03 / How risky is the situation?

Ask yourself these questions to think about the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19:

» Is the space indoors, with poor air flow?
» Will it be crowded?
» Will it be hard to stay at least 2 meters away from others?
» Will people be unmasked or not fully vaccinated?
» Will others be spreading particles that could cause COVID whenever they eat, speak loudly, laugh or sing?

Your risk of catching and spreading COVID increases with each response of "yes."

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04 / **What are my personal risks?**

If you or someone you live with is at higher risk of getting seriously ill from COVID – because of your age or medical conditions – it is important to take extra care by wearing the highest quality mask.

05 / **What is available and what can I afford?**

Choose the best mask you can afford. Respirator masks are sometimes hard to find and are expensive. You can also save more expensive masks for situations where you are at higher risk of catching and spreading COVID.

When wearing a mask, remember:

Do:
- ✓ Use a clean, dry mask that is undamaged
- ✓ Clean your hands before and after touching your mask
- ✓ Make sure your mask fits well by adjusting the nosepiece and ear loops/headbands
- ✓ Let your medical mask/respirator air out after use. Re-use it if it's clean. Store it in a clean paper or cloth bag between use
- ✓ Wash reusable non-medical masks with hot, soapy water. Dry completely before wearing again

Don't:
- ✓ Use a mask that is soiled or damp
- ✓ Share your mask with others
- ✓ Use a scarf, bandana or face shield instead of a mask

For more information on masks, visit: **https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/covid-19-fact-sheet-optimizing-masks.pdf?sc_lang=en** and **https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/covid-19-safely-use-non-medical-mask-face-covering.html**

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