

MASK UP

High-quality, well-fitting masks can protect you and others!



How does COVID spread?

Tiny, infectious particles of virus—called **aerosols**—are produced by an infected person from talking, laughing, singing or just breathing. They can spread through any room or closed space, such as an office, school, bus, train, store, or theater. They can stay in the air and remain infectious for many hours. When an infected person sneezes or coughs, they may produce **much larger droplets**, which fall to the floor within minutes.

Why do I need a mask?

Masks protect you from catching COVID because they can stop aerosols as well as larger droplets.

Masks also protect others, which can be important whether you have COVID symptoms or if you happen to be one of the **40% of people infected with COVID who have no symptoms**.

How do I find the right style for me?

The best mask is the one that fits snugly against your face and is comfortable. Masks come in different shapes and sizes. You'll find “cup” style masks, “duckbill” masks and “flat-fold” masks, as shown on the next page. Start with ordering masks in small quantities and try different styles to find the best one for your face.

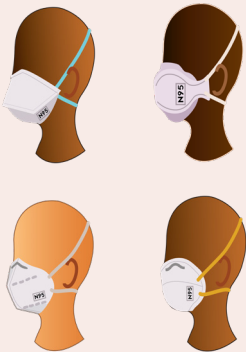
Does how I wear a mask matter?

Yes, wearing a mask under your nose provides **no** protection. A high-quality mask with only one strap around your head provides less protection than both straps worn correctly.

Follow the instructions that come with your mask to be as protected as possible.

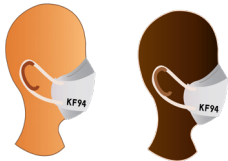
Which masks are best?

Choose masks that are **high quality** and **well-fitting**.



BEST: N95

Quality filter material; has a tight fit because of the straps over the head and can produce an airtight seal. They come in several shapes, as shown at left. They are best for people with high-exposure situations, or people who are vulnerable due to medical conditions or age.



VERY GOOD: KN95 and KF94

Quality filter material. Can fit against the face without gaps. Try different models for best fit to your face. Many people find them more comfortable and easier to breathe through than N95s. They are best for everyday use with moderate exposures, such as running errands, or attending indoor events. KN95s and KF94s come in children's sizes.



GOOD: DOUBLE MASKING, cloth over surgical

When a cloth mask improves the fit of the surgical mask, then double masking adds more protection than just a surgical mask.



PRETTY GOOD: Surgical mask

Quality filter material, but not well-fitting. Offer much better protection than not wearing a mask! For some people, surgical masks can be made more form-fitting by knotting the ear loops where they attach to the mask, then folding and tucking the extra material under the edges.



BAD: CLOTH MASK

Cloth masks alone are **not** effective against aerosols and the new variants.

How do I know my mask is reliable (not fake)?

There are a lot of **fake (counterfeit) masks** on the market. As many as 60% of KN95s may be fake. These masks may have inferior filter material or straps in the wrong place. Here are some tips on avoiding fake masks:

- **N95s:** Nearly all N95s (also called respirators) have head straps. If you see one that has earloops, it is likely fake. N95s are NIOSH* approved (unlike KN95s or KF94s). They must have a **Testing and Certification (TC) approval number** (e.g. TC 84A-XXXX) printed on the mask. They will also have a part number, N95, NIOSH, and a lot number.
- **KN95s:** If these masks meet Chinese standards they will include the name, trademark, or other maker (manufacturer) or supplier identification. They will also have the model or size and the number and year of publication of the Chinese respiratory protection standard combined with a filter classification, such as GB2626-2918 KN95.
- **KF94s:** These masks are made and closely regulated in Korea, but sometimes fakes are made in China. The mask won't have text, but the package should say "Made in Korea" and should include the product name, maker name and distributor name. Each separate mask should be packaged in a flat, glossy wrapper with a textured border. The wrapper will have an expiration date and a lot number printed on it. The package may be in Korean, but many companies now have English packaging. Importers like **Be Healthy** or **KMact** carry reliable masks.† Once you learn the names of a few KF94 makers, you can try to find their websites to learn where they are sold.

*National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

†Aaron Collins, an engineer who routinely tests masks, recommends these Korean beauty product importers.



What about reusing a mask?

You can **reuse a mask** for many hours before discarding it. But if the mask is visibly stained, soiled, frayed, wet, or the straps are loose, toss it. You shouldn't wash them. Washing will damage the filter material.

What if I have facial hair?

If you have **facial hair** that extends beyond the edges of an N95, you can't get an airtight seal. But N95s still offer the best protection for people with beards.

A recent study found that with KF94s and KN95s, the longer a beard, the more it reduced the

effectiveness of the mask, but these masks still offered more protection than cloth masks.

Another study found that putting an **exercise resistance band** over the beard and tying it at the crown of the head significantly improved mask effectiveness.



Anything else I should know?

Avoid masks with an exhalation valve. The valve allows your unfiltered breath to be exhaled into the air around you.



Find free masks!

For more resources, including a weekly weather report on COVID in the United States, visit [peoplescdc.org](https://www.peoplescdc.org), Follow us on *Twitter*, and join our *mailing list*.