



A Union of Professionals

# COVID-19 Resources: Cloth Face Coverings

## Where They Fit in COVID-19 Protection— Do's and Don'ts

APRIL 7, 2020

Every day, we face the challenge of limiting our exposure to COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommends that you should cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when you have to go out in public—to the grocery store, for example, or to pick up other necessities.

Cloth face coverings may have a place in guarding against exposure, but it's important to understand where they fit in the overall protection strategy.

**It is also important that individuals do not use a surgical mask or N95 respirator meant for a healthcare worker.**

- Right now, there is a shortage in the medical community of surgical masks and N95 respirators, and there will be even fewer if the public starts buying them en masse.
- Surgical masks and N95 respirators should be reserved for those most at risk—our healthcare workers and emergency responders.
- Most people do not need the high level of protection offered by a medical mask—the potential for exposure is much lower in a grocery store, for example, than in a hospital.

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Healthcare experts believe that as many as 25 percent of infected people may remain symptom-free.
- These asymptomatic individuals can still transmit the virus, even by talking. This means you could spread COVID-19 to others even if you do not feel sick.
- A cloth face covering is not intended to protect the wearer, but it may prevent the spread of virus from the wearer to others. This would be especially important if someone is infected but does not have symptoms.
- Cloth face coverings are not a substitute for social distancing. **Social distancing and good hand hygiene remain the most effective steps to prevent coronavirus exposure and transmission.**

Find these resources and more at [www.aft.org/coronavirus](http://www.aft.org/coronavirus)

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of 1.7 million professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

Randi Weingarten  
PRESIDENT

Loretta Johnson  
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Evelyn DeJesus  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



## A cloth face covering

- Provides limited protection to wearers from the large droplets, splashes and sprays produced by people within six feet. However, the cloth face covering is not a barrier to most of the smaller virus particles shed by infected people, even at that distance.
- Doesn't protect your eyes from exposure.
- Is loose fitting, and gaps may allow the virus or other germs to enter behind the face covering.
- There is no information available on the durability and effectiveness of cloth face coverings. There are still outstanding questions as to the best fabric to use (100 percent cotton seems to be best) and how to reuse and sanitize the face coverings, so be cautious of becoming overconfident if you use them.
- Keep your hands away from the face covering and your face. **And always practice good hand hygiene and social distancing.**

**Constantly adjusting your face covering, touching your face and, most important, relaxing your social distancing practices will negate the potential benefits of wearing a face cover.**

## How to make and use a cloth face covering

- Face coverings should include multiple layers of fabric that allow for breathing without restriction and have a way to secure the covering with ties or ear loops. The CDC has instructions on how to make both sewn and no-sew face coverings.

### **[bit.ly/DIY-FaceCovering](https://bit.ly/DIY-FaceCovering)**

- Before putting on a cloth face covering, clean your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your mouth and nose with the face covering and try to get it to fit as tightly as possible to your face.
- Avoid touching the face covering while using it. If you do, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Launder and machine dry face coverings frequently and make sure they don't get damaged or change in shape.
- Have a dedicated face covering for each member of the family (no sharing of masks).
- If a face covering gets wet or damp while you have it on, it's less effective, so consider having multiple face coverings on hand.
- Cloth face coverings should not be placed on children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

Wearing cloth face coverings is an additional public health measure people should take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The CDC still recommends that you stay at least six feet away from other people (social distancing), frequent hand cleaning and other everyday preventive actions.