



Considerations for Double Masking to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19



SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can be transmitted from person-to-person by respiratory aerosols (airborne liquid droplets and dried particles). Infected people produce these aerosols while talking, singing, coughing, breathing, or sneezing. Some of the larger droplets settle to the ground in a few minutes, whereas the smaller droplets can remain in the air for several hours. Masks are a simple barrier to help prevent your respiratory droplets from reaching others. Studies show that masks reduce the spray of droplets when worn over the nose and mouth.

The [CDC recommends](#) wearing a mask in public settings when around people not living in your household and particularly where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, such as grocery stores. Masks offer some protection to you and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. Effective February 2, 2021, masks are required on planes, buses, trains, and other forms of public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States and in U.S. transportation hubs such as airports and stations.

If one mask is good, are two masks better?

The CDC has not issued official guidance on double masking. Earlier this week (February 2021), the CDC said to wear a mask with two or more layers of fabric covering the mouth and nose. That does not necessarily mean wearing two masks but instead wearing one quality mask with multiple layers. Masks that meet that criteria are surgical masks, N95/KN95 respirators, and cloth masks constructed of two or more layers of material.

I see healthcare workers wearing double masks. Should I do the same?

The best level of protection against the COVID-19 virus is the N95/KN95 respirator. At the beginning of the pandemic, these respirators, which were designed to be replaced often, were in short supply. Medical workers were double masking to extend the use of their N95/KN95 respirators by protecting the outer layer from aerosol exposure. The addition of a surgical mask over the N95/KN95 respirator did not enhance the respirator's effectiveness; it merely helped keep the respirator clean so that it could be reused more often.



Dr. Fauci said adding more layers makes sense. Does that mean that two masks are better?

Dr. Fauci appeared on the *TODAY Show* on January 25, 2021, and said, “If you have a physical covering with one layer, you put another layer on, it just makes common sense that it likely would be more effective, and that’s the reason why you see people either double masking or doing a version of an N95.”

Dr. Fauci clarified his statement a few days later on CNN, stating, “The CDC does not recommend that you should wear two masks, nor does the CDC recommend that you have to wear an N95 mask. They just say, ‘The most important thing is (to) get everybody to wear a mask.’”

Does wearing two masks versus one help or hurt?

There are some potential advantages and disadvantages to wearing two masks versus one.

- Some healthcare workers may decide to continue to wear a surgical mask over their N95/KN95 respirator since the N95/KN95 respirators are still in limited supply.
- Wearing two single-layer cloth masks may provide added protection compared to one single-layer cloth mask. However, wearing one mask with two layers may be more comfortable.
- One drawback of wearing two masks is that the multiple layers of material could make it more difficult to breathe. If you have trouble breathing while wearing one mask, adding another may not be the best option for you.
- Wearing two masks may help keep a snug fit and may help reduce gaps.

Whether you decide to wear one face mask or more, the important thing is to wear a quality mask.

Will a face shield provide the same level of protection as a face mask or N95/KN95?

No. A N95/KN95 respirator will block 99% of the aerosols produced by a cough. A medical-grade mask blocks 59%, and a 3-ply cloth face mask blocks 51%. In contrast, a face shield only blocks 2% of the aerosol generated by a cough. Face shields are often used with masks by certain healthcare workers and those placed in higher risk occupational settings to provide splash and excessive aerosols from reaching the face and eyes.

Should I wear a N95/KN95 respirator since they provide the best level of protection?

The CDC recommends that N95/KN95 respirators be reserved for healthcare workers as they are still in limited supply. The proper use of N95/KN95 respirators requires specialized training and fit testing. Using a N95/KN95 respirator without proper training and fit testing may only achieve the same level of protection as a properly donned surgical mask. There is now a sufficient supply of surgical masks, and they are less expensive and are generally considered more comfortable to wear.

How can I prevent my eyeglasses from fogging?

If you wear glasses, find a mask that fits closely over your nose or one that has a nose wire to limit fogging.

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www.hayscompanies.com | info@hayscompanies.com

