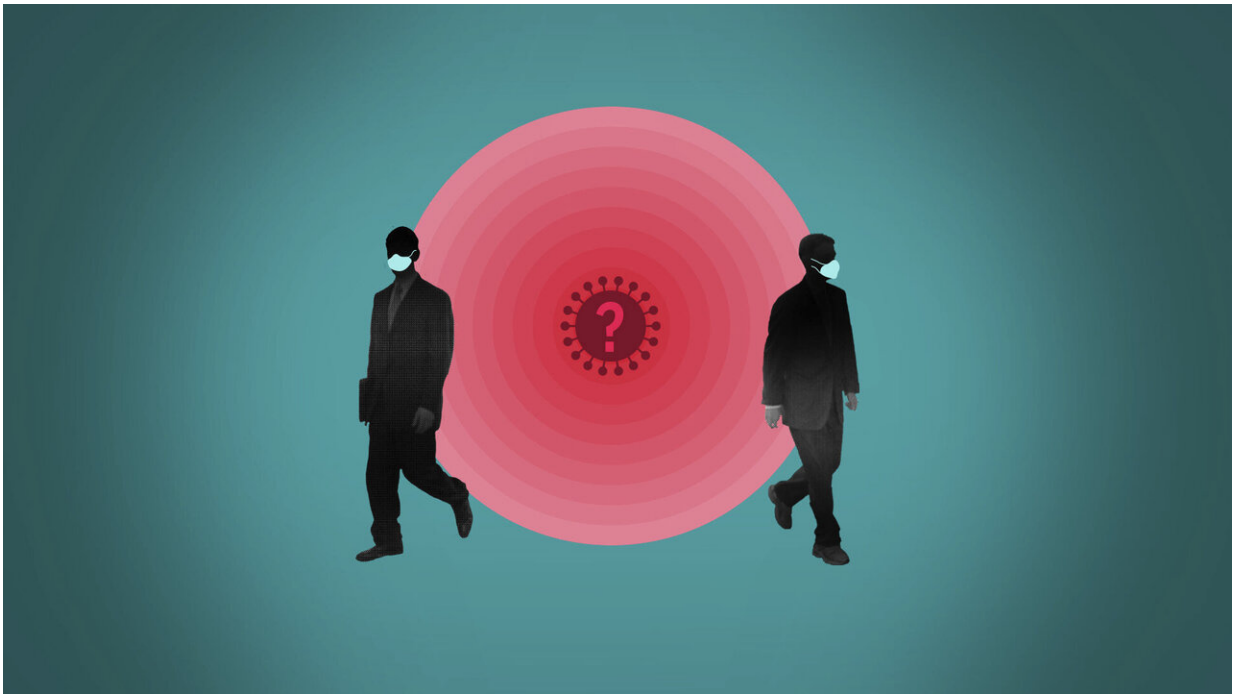


Do I need to wear a mask if I'm 6 feet away from others?

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AP Illustration/Peter Hamlin

Do I need to wear a mask if I'm 6 feet away from others?

Health experts recommend wearing [masks](#) in public and keeping your distance from others in most cases, but whether you should do both could depend on the situation.

"There's no invisible force field at 6 feet," said Saskia Popescu, an infectious disease expert at George Mason University.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says spread of the virus beyond 6 feet is uncommon but more likely in poorly ventilated spaces. Some [health experts](#) say the virus can spread more easily than the agency indicates, and suggest wearing masks even in prolonged outdoor gatherings when people are more than 6 feet apart.

Other factors could also influence whether it's best to keep your distance while also wearing a mask. When people raise their voices or pant—such as when they sing, shout or exercise—they can expel more respiratory droplets or aerosols, and send them traveling farther through the air. The longer you're in a situation with potential for exposure to the virus, the greater your risk of infection.

"The reason this stuff is so confusing is people want clear answers, and there's not a straightforward answer," said Lisa M. Lee, a public health expert at Virginia Tech.

Since no protective measure is entirely effective, Lee suggests layering safeguards like masks, social distancing and [hand washing](#).

"And your mask is your basic layer," she said.

Getting in the habit of wearing a mask anytime you leave the house also eliminates having to decide when you should, said Bob Bednarczyk, an [expert](#) in [infectious diseases](#) at Emory University.

"It's one less thing to worry about," he said.

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