

# Answers to your questions about face masks

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(HealthDay)—Face masks are a key tool in the fight against the coronavirus, but many people wonder if it's safe to wear a mask for a prolonged period. Some also question whether a mask can restrict

oxygen intake or cause a buildup of carbon dioxide.

"As a pulmonologist, I can assure you that for most people wearing a mask is safe," said Dr. Daniel Dilling, a critical care medicine specialist at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Ill.

"I wear a mask every day. Most masks do not limit the amount of air that you breathe in, nor decrease your body's ability to fight COVID-19," Dilling said in a Loyola news release.

"Most importantly, masks work," Dilling added. "COVID-19 is known to spread person-to-person, primarily via saliva droplets or spray. A mask limits the amount of [coronavirus](#) droplets transmitted by you, and protects you from the virus entering your nose or mouth."

According to the American Lung Association, just a 50% reduction in viral transmission can limit disease exposure and the potential for severe symptoms.

Cloth masks are very effective if they have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric and completely cover the nose and mouth and fit snugly against the side of the face without gaps. A fabric mask should not be so thick that it is uncomfortable to breathe, the lung association says.

Disposable, paper masks are also effective in reducing respiratory droplet spread, Dilling said.

Surgical masks can be worn once or twice before disposal. Cloth masks should be washed "on a regular basis," Dilling said.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not recommend masks for children under the age of 2, "or anyone who has

trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance."

A mask can be worn "when walking on an indoor track or when doing stretching or low-intensity forms of yoga indoors," according to the CDC. Wearing a mask while running or doing other high-intensity exercise or [physical activity](#) may limit airflow. If possible, these activities should be done outdoors while social distancing, the CDC says.

In addition, the CDC does not recommend the public use N95 masks, which are intended for health care workers. There is evidence that prolonged wearing of these [masks](#) by individuals with lung conditions may cause a buildup of carbon dioxide.

"Masks with an exhalation valve or vents also are not recommended as they allow air and respiratory particles to escape, putting those around you at risk," Dilling said.

"You don't always know when someone is infected with COVID-19 coronavirus," Dilling said. "Correctly wearing an appropriate mask that covers your nose and mouth helps to decrease the spread and impact of COVID-19. It protects you and those around you from catching and experiencing [severe symptoms](#) from this potentially deadly disease."

**More information:** For more on wearing a mask, head to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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