

Which masks protect against omicron?

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As we begin to learn more about the omicron variant, there are concerns regarding the best ways to stay safe against this new threat. Peter Gulick, a professor of medicine at the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine and infectious disease expert, answers questions about the best ways for Spartans to protect themselves against the

variant.

How can people protect themselves from getting sick with the omicron variant?

Masks are definitely one of the best ways for individuals to protect themselves against omicron. While much is still unknown about the variant, the [CDC continues to advise](#) individuals to wear a [face mask](#) in public areas to help limit community transmission. Masks not only reduce exposure to omicron, but also reduce the chances of getting infected and reducing the severity of infection.

Another vital step people can take to protect themselves against omicron is by receiving a COVID-19 vaccination and booster. A [study](#) from the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that having two doses of the Pfizer vaccine was 70% effective against hospitalization with omicron. Additionally, [research](#) from the Imperial College London found the Pfizer vaccine became 85.9% effective against omicron after receiving a booster.

There's been a lot in the media about cloth masks. Are they effective against omicron? What if you double up cloth masks?

Unlike in the past, cloth [masks](#) are not as effective against [omicron](#) unless multilayered. I recommend wearing two masks, especially if in a high-risk exposure area and not fully vaccinated.

Which type of mask is best?

The mask that provides the best protection against all forms of

COVID-19 is the N95 masks. These masks filter out 95% of particles in the air and can be found online or in some retail stores. Those these are the best masks, it's most important to wear a well-fitted mask. Here are the CDC's new mask guidelines.

Should I wash my masks?

Try to limit the number of times you wash your mask. Washing your mask sometimes disrupts the material and makes it less effective. If you do need to wash a cloth mask, the CDC recommends including your mask with your regular laundry or washing by hand using water and laundry detergent.

How often should I change my mask?

Make sure to change your mask if it no longer fits firmly on your face with no gaps. I also advise on changing your mask if it gets wet or dirty to help maintain effectiveness, and to change your mask after going into a high-risk area.

Does wearing a mask in the office help or should back-to-office plans be dropped or changed?

Wearing a mask indoors or in poorly ventilated areas does help protect you against COVID-19. However, those who are at high risk such as those who are immunosuppressed, unvaccinated, living with comorbid conditions or are over the age of 65 should strongly consider working from home if they can.

Provided by Michigan State University

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