

Have a reusable face mask? Here's how to wash it the right way

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Since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended cloth face coverings for the general public, many have relied on those while reserving medical masks, such as N95 respirators, for medical workers.

While there are ways to properly wear and remove [face masks](#) in general (washing your hands is one step), cloth masks must be washed in order to be properly reused.

Here's what the CDC and experts say about how to properly clean reusable face masks.

What should I use to wash my cloth mask?

Soap and water will get masks clean, according to Reviewed.

"Warm water and any detergent you're used to using at home should work great," Dr. Gabriela Andujar Vazquez, an infectious disease physician and associate hospital epidemiologist at Tufts Medical Center, told the website.

You can hand wash or put the mask in the washer, the latter of which the CDC says should suffice to properly clean it. Then, you can let it air dry or put it in the dryer on the hot setting to help kill any potentially remaining particles.

Still, Carolyn Forte, director of the Good Housekeeping Institute Cleaning Lab, suggests all face masks be washed with hot water in the washing machine and dried on [high heat](#), according to Good Housekeeping.

More delicate items, the magazine said, needed to be hand-washed for at least 20 seconds with warm or hot water before going into the dryer. It also notes that masks can be ironed on the cotton or linen setting for peace of mind.

How often should I wash my cloth mask?

The CDC says masks "should be routinely washed depending on the frequency of use." But that leaves the door open for interpretation. Experts say masks should be washed daily, which means [hand washing](#) will likely be your go-to method.

"My recommendation would be to wash your mask every day," Dr. Cassandra Pierre, an infectious disease physician at Boston Medical Center, told Reviewed. "If you're using it and going out to run errands, you run the risk of having droplets collect on the surface of the mask."

If you feel you may have been exposed to the coronavirus, however, extra precautions should be taken.

"If you've been out on the subway, for example, and someone sneezes on you, you might want to peel off that mask into a plastic bag when you arrive at your destination," Pierre said. "It's a higher likelihood that it could be contaminated and you don't want to wait until the end of the day to wash it."

Be aware, though, that if your mask becomes worn or frayed, you'll need to replace it.

What about filters?

Some reusable masks have filters that need to be washed, too.

The Chicago Tribune reports some filters, particularly HVAC ones, can be worn two to three times before requiring washing, but some people choose to wash filters as frequently as they cleanse their masks. Still, filters are, for the most part, meant for one-time use. Because of that, they'll be replaced more often than you'd replace your reusable mask. It's also important to note that every wash reduces filters' effectiveness.

Filters are also more delicate than [masks](#), so they should be hand washed rather than placed in the [washing machine](#). To dry, place in the dryer, or better yet, use a hairdryer and keep it at least 6 to 8 inches away from the filter during the process.

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