The guidance and requirements for the use of face masks / cloths covering the nose and mouth vary greatly. In some locations, authorities require or recommend everyone to wear a face mask (or cloth covering the nose and mouth) when in public areas. In other locations, authorities recommend against the use of masks for the general public when there is little COVID-19 activity. The World Health Organization advises "the general public should be encouraged to use medical and non-medical masks in areas with known or suspected community transmission". The ECDC advises that "The use of face masks in the community could be considered, especially when visiting busy, closed spaces, such as grocery stores, shopping centres, or when using public transport, etc."

How might face masks be used?

1. To prevent spread of virus to others

- All authorities recommend a mask for sick people when they are seeking healthcare / when in healthcare facilities / in contact with a caregiver. Some authorities are recommending everyone to wear a mask in public, particularly in areas where there is a lot of community transmission. People who do not have symptoms are potentially infectious so if people who are well wear a mask when in public, theoretically this might reduce the amount of transmission..

2. To prevent getting infected

- Most authorities recommend people who are providing care to sick household member should wear a medical mask (if available) when in contact / in the same room as the sick person. Many also recommend people who are at higher risk of severe disease to consider wearing a mask .
- Use of a mask alone is not sufficient to prevent infection. It will not prevent virus entering the eyes – eyes can be protected by wearing glasses or a face shield. Hygiene and physical distancing as much as possible must be used as well.

International SOS recognises that the use of face masks is one among several preventive measures that need to be followed to in order to reduce the spread of the infection and advises the following regarding use of masks in the community:

- Mask use MUST follow all local regulations and requirements.
- Medical masks – should be used by sick people when in contact with others AND caregivers in contact with sick people
- Masks (or a cloth covering the face and nose) can be used when in public, particularly
  - when in face-to-face contact with others
  - when social distancing cannot be achieved
  - By people in high risk groups
- All general social distancing and hygiene guidance must still be followed (staying at home as much as possible, keeping 1-2 metres away from others, avoiding crowded places, keeping any essential face to face interactions as short as possible, general hygiene measures such as avoiding touching the face, washing hands often,).
- Masks must be worn and removed correctly (see Using Face Masks)

Further Information

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19

World Health Organization (WHO)
When and How to Use Masks
Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19

Disclaimer: This information has been developed for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Should you have questions or concerns about any topic described here, please consult your healthcare professional.

Using face masks

Only wear a clean mask, and always follow the manufacturer's instructions/ guidance of your local authorities

How to put on a mask

Wash your hands before putting on your mask.

1. Place the mask over your nose and mouth, ensuring the correct side is facing outwards.

2. Shape the top edge of the mask to the bridge of your nose.

3. Tie the top strings in a bow at the back of your head. The strings should sit above your ears.

4. Tie the bottom strings in a bow at the back of your neck. The strings should sit below your ears.

5. Make sure the mask fits snugly around the face and below chin.

6. Once you have put the mask on, do NOT touch the front.

How to remove a mask

The front of the mask may be contaminated – DO NOT TOUCH.

Wash your hands before taking your mask off.

1. Grasp the ties and undo the bows – undo the bottom strings first, then the top.

2. Remove the mask without touching the front.

3. Hold the mask by the strings and
   - if disposable - drop it into the waste container.
   - if reusable – the mask should be washed / cleaned before re-use
   - if the mask cannot be washed but you need to store it to wear again – place it in a "breathable" container (e.g paper bag).

4. Wash your hands or use alcohol based hand sanitiser immediately.

Using face Masks

INTERNATIONAL SOS

WORLDWIDE REACH. HUMAN TOUCH.