

The Difference Between Alternative Masks and Surgical Masks for COVID-19

Alternative Masks

What is it?

- Non-FDA-regulated masks, including homemade masks.
- May reduce the likelihood of transmitting the virus by the wearer, but they are not proven to protect health care staff or patients.

Who wears it?

Asymptomatic people.

How it works

■ **Protects other people** by reducing the amount of respiratory droplets expelled by a person who may be infected but not showing signs of illness.

Limitations

- Not regulated and do not protect the wearer.
- Not to be used by people who are sick.
- Breathing into a facemask builds up moisture, which can be uncomfortable to wear.
- Need to be regularly washed and sanitized.
- Avoid touching the mask while wearing it; if you do touch it, wash hands thoroughly.

Disposal

During disposal, avoid touching the mask and wash hands thoroughly afterward.

Surgical Masks

- FDA-regulated masks that are fluid resistant and provide the wearer protection against large droplets, splashes, or sprays of bodily or other hazardous fluids.
- Health care staff during the evaluation of and care for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients.
- Protects the wearer by creating a barrier to the virus or body fluid that may contain the virus.
- Due to high demand, supply may be limited.
- Avoid touching the mask while wearing it; if you do touch it, wash hands thoroughly.
- Do not wash the mask.
- Reuse of facemasks may be limited by the type of fastening (e.g., elastic ear hooks may be more robust than ties that are more liable to tearing).
- Discard when it becomes damaged or deformed; becomes wet or visibly dirty; breathing becomes difficult; or if it becomes contaminated with blood, respiratory or nasal secretions, or other bodily fluids.
- Should be donned and doffed appropriately.
- During disposal, avoid touching the mask and wash hands thoroughly afterward.