



USE OF SURGICAL MASKS

What are SURGICAL MASKS?

Surgical masks are disposable devices that cover the mouth and nose during medical procedures. They prevent the spread of infection between sick and well persons. Surgical masks are typically used in a health facility (hospitals, emergency departments, out-patient facilities, residential care facilities, emergency medical services, and home health care delivery). During disease outbreaks, health officials sometimes recommend that the public wear surgical masks to control the spread of the disease.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates surgical masks and evaluates their performance for safety and effectiveness. The FDA requires good manufacturing practices.

What should I know before using surgical masks?

- Using surgical masks will not fully protect you from being infected. Hand-washing, isolating infected patients, and covering the mouth and nose when coughing also help to reduce to the risk of infection.
- Masks must be changed when they become wet with saliva or other bodily fluids, as they lose their protective properties.
- Surgical masks are not tested against specific microorganisms and do not prevent specific diseases.
- Never reuse, wash or disinfect surgical masks.
- Never share surgical masks with others.
- Place used or soiled masks into a tied plastic bag to prevent dripping.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water, or use an alcohol-based hand gel after handling.

How do I know which surgical mask to choose?

Surgical masks should be:

- Labeled as surgical, laser, isolation, dental or medical procedure masks. These types protect against microorganisms, body fluids, and large particles in the air.
- Loosely cover the mouth and nose to prevent exposure to the wearer's saliva and respiratory secretions.
- Made of soft materials and be comfortable to wear.
- Packaged in boxes of single-use masks.

What about non-medical masks?

There are a variety of masks available for various occupational exposures that are not for medical use and are not regulated by FDA. Many of them are for filtering out particles of dust and mist from wood, metal, and masonry work. Non-medical masks are available from many sources including hardware stores and online.

How do I know when to use it?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends infection control measures, including advice about surgical masks. For more information, see CDC's *Infection Control Guidelines*. Surgical masks can be purchased without a prescription from pharmacies and medical supply sources.

References and Sources

- U.S. Food and Drug Administration: www.fda.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- Pandemic Flu: www.pandemicflu.gov