



IMA Public Health Committee – February 11, 2022

Effectiveness of Face Masks

Do masks stop the spread of COVID-19?

Yes, masks work in two ways:

1. **They protect you.** Early in the pandemic, it was not known if masks protect the mask-wearer. Now we have evidence that they do provide significant protection. In a [recent study](#), it was shown that those who wear masks had about 50% less likelihood of testing positive for COVID-19. [Read more](#).
2. **They protect your community.** The best available science shows that masks reduce the possibility that you could spread COVID-19 to others. This is one of the reasons that surgeons and others in an operating room wear masks: to protect the patient.

Some people have asymptomatic COVID-19 infections and can spread the virus unknowingly. Most people are contagious with the virus before they have symptoms. Masking in public crowded spaces will help slow the unintentional spread of COVID-19. Reducing that spread helps protect those who are at high risk for severe illness.

Reducing spread will help the community get back to normal. If each person reduced the spread of a highly contagious virus, like the COVID-19 Delta and Omicron variants, by the proven 50% effectiveness of masks, overall cases in the community would be reduced dramatically. The fewer people who have COVID-19, the fewer people that can spread it.

The most compelling [observational study](#) occurred early in the pandemic when two COVID-19 positive salon workers wore masks and did not infect a single one of their 139 patrons while sick. A [much larger study](#) also shows mask-wearing is associated with decreased spread of COVID-19.

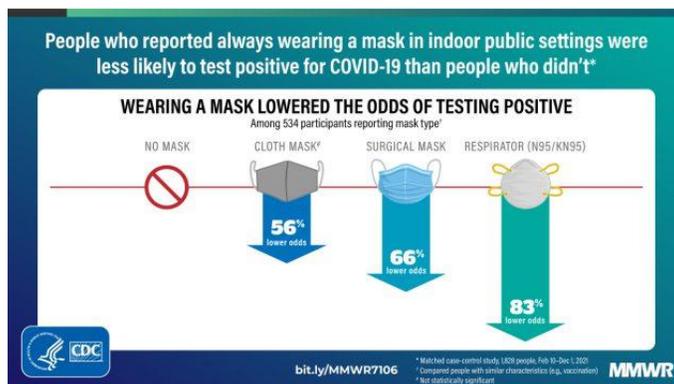
Do I need to wear a mask all the time?

No, but the more you wear a mask, the more successful you will be in helping slow the spread of COVID-19. The highest risk areas are crowded indoor places with poor ventilation. Loud talking, shouting, and singing amplify the likelihood of spread, so wearing

masks in these situations is even more helpful. The lowest risk areas are outside with physical distancing.

Which mask should I wear?

You may choose a different mask for different circumstances. N95 and KN95 masks are the most effective in protecting you. Both of these masks are designed to stop a lot of airborne particles from entering around the edges of the mask. These should be used in the highest-risk situations. Again, the more you wear a mask of any kind, the less likely you will get or spread the virus.



Source: CDC.

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7106e1.htm?s_cid=mm7106e1_w

Why do I need to wear a mask if I am vaccinated?

You can still get and give the virus to others. Even though most vaccinated people will be well protected against severe and life-threatening COVID-19 infections, you can still spread the virus to others in your household and community. However, [some studies have found that infectious viral loads in an unvaccinated individual can be higher and stay high longer](#), both of which increase the likelihood of spreading COVID-19 to others.

Can I wear a mask and still get sick?

That can happen, no mask is 100% protective. However, we know that masks are more effective when you wear them regularly and most people don't wear them all the time. In addition, choosing a higher quality mask such as a KN95 or N95 increases protection. The goal is to reduce the likelihood of getting AND spreading COVID-19.

Why should I care about community spread?

Reducing community spread helps keep employees at work, kids in school, and our health care system away from crisis standards of care. The use of masks is an important tool in the toolbox along with vaccination, physical distancing, and other common sense public health measures.