

This document describes interim guidance for the use of facemasks¹ and respirators² in certain public settings during an influenza pandemic. Very little information is available about the effectiveness of facemasks and respirators in controlling the spread of pandemic influenza in community settings. In the absence of scientific data, this document offers interim recommendations that are based on public health judgment and on the historical use of facemasks and respirators in other settings. In brief, these interim recommendations advise the following:

- Whenever possible, rather than relying on the use of facemasks or respirators, close contact³ and crowded conditions should be avoided during an influenza pandemic.
- Facemasks should be considered for use by individuals who enter crowded settings, both to protect their nose and mouth from other people's coughs and to reduce the wearers' likelihood of coughing on others. The time spent in crowded settings should be as short as possible.
- Respirators should be considered for use by individuals for whom close contact with an infectious person is unavoidable. This can include selected individuals who must take care of a sick person (e.g., family member with a respiratory infection) at home.
- Facemasks and respirators should be used in combination with other preventive measures, such as hand hygiene and social distancing, to help reduce the risk for influenza infection during a pandemic. This interim guidance will be updated as new information becomes available.

These interim recommendations will be revised as new information about the use of facemasks and respirators in the setting of pandemic influenza becomes available. For up-to-date information about pandemic influenza, visit www.pandemicflu.gov.

Consider wearing a facemask if

- You are sick with the flu and think you might have close contact with others.
- You live with someone who has the flu (you therefore might be in the early stages of infection) and need to be in a crowded place. Limit the amount of time you spend in these crowded places and wear a facemask while you are there.
- You are well and do not expect to be in close contact with a sick person but need to be in a crowded place. Limit the amount of time you spend in these crowded places and wear a facemask while you are there.

Consider wearing a respirator if

- You are well and you expect to be in close contact with people who are known or thought to be sick with pandemic flu. Limit the amount of time you are in close contact with these people and wear a respirator during this time. These recommendations apply if you must take care of a sick person at home.

What is a facemask?

Facemasks are loose-fitting, disposable masks that cover the nose and mouth. These include products labeled as surgical, dental, medical procedure, isolation, and laser masks.

Facemasks help stop droplets from being spread by the person wearing them. They also keep splashes or sprays from reaching the mouth and nose of the person wearing the facemask. They are not designed to protect you against breathing in very small particles. Facemasks should be used once and then thrown away in the trash.

What is a respirator?

A respirator (for example, an N95 or higher filtering facepiece respirator) is designed to protect you from breathing in very small particles, which might contain viruses. These types of respirators fit tightly to the face so that most air is inhaled through the filter material. To work the best way, N95 respirators must be specially fitted for each person who wears one (this is called “fit-testing” and is usually done in a workplace where respirators are used). Most of the time, N95 respirators are used in construction and other jobs that involve dust and small particles. Some healthcare workers, such as nurses and doctors, use these types of respirators when taking care of patients with diseases that can be spread through the air.

If you have a heart or lung disease or other health condition, you may have trouble breathing through respirators and you should talk with your doctor before using a respirator.

Like surgical masks, N95 respirators should be worn only once and then thrown away in the trash.

Additional Information

Neither a facemask nor a respirator will give complete protection from the flu. That is why it is important to wash your hands often, cover your coughs and sneezes with a handkerchief or your arm, and avoid crowds and gatherings during a pandemic. To learn more about these and other issues relating to pandemic influenza, visit www.pandemicflu.gov.

[1] Unless otherwise specified, the term “facemasks” in this document refers to disposable masks cleared by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use as medical devices. This includes facemasks labeled as surgical, dental, medical procedure, isolation, or laser masks. Such facemasks have several designs. One type is affixed to the head with two ties, conforms to the face with the aid of a flexible adjustment for the nose bridge, and may be flat/pleated or duck-billed in shape. Another

Facemask and Respirator Use Recommendations

www.networkofhope.net | info@networkofhope.net



type of facemask is pre-molded, adheres to the head with a single elastic band, and has a flexible adjustment for the nose bridge. A third type is flat/pleated and affixes to the head with ear loops. Facemasks cleared by FDA for use as medical devices have been determined to have specific levels of protection from penetration of blood and body fluids.

[2] Unless otherwise specified, “respirator” in this document refers to an N95 or higher filtering facepiece respirator certified by the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

[3] Three feet has often been used by infection control professionals to define close contact and is based on studies of respiratory infections; however, for practical purposes, this distance may range up to 6 feet. The World Health Organization defines close contact as “approximately 1 meter”; the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration uses “within 6 feet.” For consistency with these estimates, this document defines close contact as a distance of up to approximately 6 feet.