

Cloth Face Coverings for Children During COVID-19

To protect ourselves and others from COVID-19, the CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings out in public. But what about children? Read on for answers to some frequently asked questions about cloth face coverings and children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why are people wearing cloth face coverings right now?

Since so many people who have COVID-19 don't have symptoms, wearing cloth face coverings reduces the chance of transmitting the virus through the spray of spit or respiratory droplets. This is especially true for when someone with COVID-19 comes within 6 feet of you, which is the range of transmitting infection through acts like sneezing or coughing.

Should children wear cloth face coverings?

Yes. Cloth face coverings can be safely worn by all children 2 years of age and older, including the vast majority of children with special health conditions, with rare exception.

Children under 2 years old should **not** wear cloth face coverings, though, because of suffocation risk. Also, anyone unconscious or unable to remove a face covering on their own should not wear one.

When do children need to wear cloth face coverings?

Children age 2 and older should wear cloth face coverings when they are:

- In child care or at school. Face coverings will be essential for children to safely return to school, child care, and other group settings. In addition to protecting the child, the use of cloth face coverings significantly reduces the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, to other children and adults.
- Unable to stay 6 feet away from others. Children age 2 and older should wear cloth face coverings indoors or outdoors when it is not possible to keep a safe distance from others. Examples include school, child care, a playground, park, grocery store or doctor's office.

If medically fragile or at-risk adults and children live in the household, families may also want to consider wearing face masks at home to help protect them.

What if my child is scared of wearing a face covering?

It is understandable that children may be afraid of cloth face coverings at first. Here are a few ideas to help make them seem less scary:

- Look in the mirror with the face coverings on and talk about it.
- Put a cloth face covering on a favorite stuffed animal.
- Decorate them so they're more personalized and fun.
- Show your child pictures of other children wearing them.
- Draw one on their favorite book character.
- Practice wearing the face covering at home to help your child get used to it.

For children under 3, it's best to answer their questions simply in language they understand. If they ask about why people are wearing cloth face coverings, explain that sometimes people wear them when they are sick, and sometimes people wear them so they don't get sick.

For children over 3, try focusing on germs. Explain that germs are special to your own body. Some germs are good and some are bad. The bad ones can make you sick. Since we can't always tell which are good or bad, the cloth face coverings help make sure you keep those germs away from your own body.

Children and teens often struggle when they feel different. They may feel that wearing a mask stereotypes them as being sick. As more people wear cloth face coverings, children will get used to them and not feel singled out or strange about wearing them. It will quickly become the "new normal" for children and teens.

What about children with special health care needs?

- Children who are considered high-risk or severely immunocompromised are encouraged to wear an N95 mask for protection.
- Families of children at higher risk are encouraged to use a standard surgical mask if they are sick to prevent the spread of illness to others.
- Children with severe cognitive or respiratory impairments may have a hard time tolerating a cloth face covering. For these children, special precautions may be needed.

Is there a "right way" to wear a cloth face covering?

Yes. Place the cloth face covering securely over the nose and mouth and stretch it from ear to ear. It should fit snugly but comfortably against the sides of the face, and be held on with ear loops or ties. Remember to wash hands before and after wearing the mask and avoid touching it once it's on. When back home, avoid touching the front of the face covering by taking it off from behind.

Wash and completely dry cloth face coverings after each wearing.

NOTE: Masks should not be worn when eating or drinking. Also, make sure the face covering has no choking or strangulation hazards for young children.

What kind of cloth face covering is best?

Homemade or purchased cloth face coverings with multiple layers of fabric are fine for most people to wear. Pleated face coverings with elastic are likely to work best for kids. For a child, especially a small child, the right fit is important. Adult cloth face coverings are usually 6x12 inches, and even a child-sized 5x10 inch covering may be too large for small children. Try to find the right size for your child's face, and be sure to adjust it for a secure fit.

Due to very limited supply now, professional grade masks like N-95 masks should be reserved for medical professionals on the front lines who have increased risk of exposure to coronavirus at close distances.

How can parents teach young children not to tamper with their cloth face covering?

Young children may take longer to teach to wear and not touch their face covering. It's a good idea for parents to practice and model this behavior at home, in a low risk setting, before a child is expected to wear a mask for long stretches of time.

While it may be a challenge for very young children not to fidget with their face covering, as mask-wearing becomes routine and reinforced by adults and peers, they will learn to follow directions. Just like children understand that they must wear bicycle helmets and buckle into their car seats, they will learn to wear masks when needed.

How do parents protect infants too young for masks?

The best way to protect children under age 2 who are too young to wear masks is to practice physical distancing, and encourage those around the infant to wear cloth face coverings.

Remember

Spending more time at home and physical distancing is still the best way to protect your family from COVID-19. Especially for younger children who may not understand why they can't run up toward other people or touch things they shouldn't, it's best to keep them home. Children who are sick (fever, cough, congestion, runny nose, diarrhea, or vomiting) should not leave home.

Talk with your pediatrician if you have any questions about your child wearing a cloth face covering.

Stay Informed

Families are encouraged to stay up to date about this situation as we learn more about how to prevent this virus from spreading in homes and in communities.

For more parenting information from the AAP, visit www.HealthyChildren.org.

For the latest developments from the CDC, including travel warnings, new cases, and prevention advice, visit www.cdc.gov.



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