Face masks: How are they different?

Physical distancing, hand washing and staying at home if you are sick are the most effective ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19; masks do not replace these actions. Masks, face coverings and gloves are the least protective measures for reducing transmission of COVID-19. Masks, when worn properly and for short periods, may offer some protection especially when you are not able to keep a 2 metre distance from others. For work settings, refer to specific workplace guidance on masks.

**Cloth masks (homemade or bought)**
- May be used by the general public to reduce the spread of large respiratory droplets. However, these masks offer minimal protection to the wearer.
- Can be made from various types of machine-washable and dryable cloth.
- If homemade, use clean woven cotton or linen e.g., a tea towel, bedsheet, pillowcase, t-shirt.
- Must be designed and worn to fully cover nose and mouth.
- Should fit snugly, let you breathe easily, and attached securely with ties or ear loops.
- Re-usable and need to be washed regularly.

**Other cloth face coverings**
- E.g., bandana, niqab, scarf, neck gaiter.
- May be used to reduce the spread of large respiratory droplets. However, face coverings offer limited protection to the wearer.
- If the material is thin, fold it into several layers.
- Be sure that it covers mouth, nose and sides of the face.

**Industrial N95 respirators**
- Used to protect workers from inhaling dust, fumes, and hazardous aerosols.
- Available in hardware stores.
- These masks are not recommended to prevent COVID-19 because if they have a valve and you cough/sneeze, you may spread a stream of germs through the valve.

**Personal protective equipment (PPE)**
These medical masks/respirators should be reserved for health providers or those caring for sick people.

**Medical/surgical masks**
- Used by healthcare workers or those caring for sick people. Not for general use, in order to reserve critical supply for healthcare.
- Protect against large droplets.
- Flat/pleated or cup shaped with a looser fit.
- Water resistant; and may come with visor.
- Meant for one-time use.

**Medical N95 respirators**
- Used by healthcare workers in healthcare settings. Not for use by the general public.
- Protect against inhaling and exhaling very small airborne particles and aerosols.
- Fits closely over the nose and mouth to form a tight seal.
- Must be custom fit and worn properly.

Learn more at [www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/masks](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/masks)