

Which Masks Provide the Best Protection from COVID-19?

A well-fitted mask has no gaps between the face and mask. Good filtration blocks virus particles from getting through the mask itself. N95 and KN95 masks are best, while a close-fitting cloth mask can be worn on top of a surgical/disposable mask to improve fit and filtration.

Most Effective	More Effective	Effective	Least Effective
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• N95 (also best for wildfire smoke)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• KF94• KN95• Double Mask• Fitted Surgical Mask	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Surgical Mask	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fabric mask with three or more cloth layers

When Wearing an Effective Mask is Especially Important

Some situations require a higher level of protection (improved fit and/or filtration)

- In any public place for people who are [older](#) or with medical conditions that put them at [higher risk of severe COVID illness](#).
- Indoor settings with persons who are not vaccinated or whose vaccination status is unknown.
- Indoor settings with poor ventilation.
- Close quarters with other people where social distancing is not possible (e.g., sitting on a crowded bus, waiting in line at a crowded airport terminal).
- When case rates are high, or if predominant variants are highly transmissible.

Even when you're at home, there are times when a higher level of protection is important, such as when:

- Providing care for family members who are sick with or may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- Living in a household with someone who is suspected of having or has COVID-19.
- Someone from outside your household comes into your home who may be unvaccinated
- You work outside the home and live with someone who is [older](#) or with a medical condition that puts them at [higher risk of severe COVID illness](#).

Cloth masks only work well if they are tight fitting and made of materials that filter out small particles. Good cloth masks have nose wires to reduce gaps from the nose, and two layers of tightly woven cotton with a third layer of non-woven fabric (can be a mask filter insert, or a synthetic fabric). Examples of less effective face coverings are two-layer cotton masks, bandanas, and gaiters.

If you do choose to use a KN95, we recommend finding a KN95 that has been tested by NIOSH and has a minimum "filtration efficiency" of 95% or higher. Additionally, almost all KN95s and KF94s have ear loops. Respirators with head straps (such as N95s) often provide a better fit than respirators with ear loops (such as KN95s), depending on head size and ear loop design. KN95 and KF94s are both available in "child" or "extra-small" sizes, making them a good option for children.

The CDC provides a [list of commercially available face coverings](#) that meet minimum filtration and breathability requirements (ASTM F3502-21).

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