



Population Health Advisory Committee

A Q&A with business, health and infectious disease leaders

“I’m not sick, and I don’t know anyone with COVID-19. Why should I wear a mask?”

You can make others sick several days before you feel sick and some people who never feel sick can still make others sick when they are infected. You cannot identify and avoid people with COVID-19 in public because many won’t look sick or even feel sick. That’s why everyone needs to wear a mask.

“Guidance on mask wearing keeps changing, it even seems politicized. What is going on?”

Early in the outbreak, the CDC said that only healthcare workers and people who were sick needed to wear masks because of concerns about limited supply of surgical masks and N95 respirators. They also believed that people were contagious mainly when symptomatic. By April, there was growing evidence that people without symptoms can infect others since that the virus can spread through tiny droplets when people talk and breathe. While physical distancing is the best way to prevent spread, the CDC issued new guidance recommending masks for anyone over two years old when they cannot maintain distance from others.


“I heard cloth masks don’t protect against the spread of virus. How do cloth masks prevent infection?”


Masks limit the spread of coronaviruses by catching the tiny water droplets we all make when we breathe or talk. Those droplets are too small to see, but they carry the coronavirus which then lands on someone else’s mouth, nose, or eyes. The droplets can also land on someone else’s hands, they then touch their face and can become infected. This starts the next case of COVID-19. Studies show that simple face masks reduce viral transmissions. If everyone wears a mask, our hospital load decreases by more than half and deaths decrease. They will reduce the average number of people infected by each coronavirus case and contribute to slowing the pandemic.


“Why should I wear a mask if it won’t keep me from catching COVID-19?”


When you wear a mask, you protect others from becoming sick. We want to keep those around us safe from catching what we have, even if we feel fine. Remember, a person can have the virus and have no symptoms. We want to protect front-line workers who are exposed all day to the public. No one should have to choose between their paycheck and their health. *The mask I wear protects you and your mask protects me.* It’s something we do for each other as a community. The more community participation, the greater the benefit. If we all do our part, we can stay open.


We propose the following tips and explanations to encourage you to wear a mask properly:


 Put it over both your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin. Don’t place the mask on your chin.

 The coronavirus infects the nose more easily than the throat or lungs. If your mask is under your nose, you are more likely to breathe in the virus. If your mask is on your chin then your lips are touching the contaminated edge.

 Don’t touch your mask while wearing it. Remove by untying it or lifting off the ear loops without touching the front of the mask or your face.

 Your mask is catching your droplets inside and someone else’s droplets outside. When you touch it, you get germs on your hands. Wash your hands before and after touching it (including putting on and taking it off).

 Wash cloth masks with hot water and soap **after each use**. Letting them set for two days is fine and applies to disposable.

 You can wash mask with regular laundry and dry on high heat.