



## Use of Surgical Masks

### About Surgical Masks

Surgical masks are disposable devices that cover the mouth and nose during medical procedures. They are a part of a system of infection control practices to prevent the spread of infection between infected and non-infected persons, typically in a health facility (hospitals, emergency departments, out-patient facilities, residential care facilities, emergency medical services, home health care delivery). During influenza pandemic emergencies however, health officials sometimes recommend the use of surgical masks for the general public to control the spread of the disease.

Surgical masks are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) which evaluates the performance to ensure their safety and effectiveness. The FDA also requires that masks are produced using good manufacturing practices.

### What should I know before using surgical masks?

- The use of surgical masks alone will not fully protect you from being infected. General hygiene practices such as hand-washing, isolating infected patients, covering the mouth and nose when coughing will also help to reduce to the risk of infection.
- Surgical masks may leave unprotected gaps between the mask and your face as they are not fit-tested to your face.
- Masks lose their protective properties and must be changed when they become wet with saliva or other bodily fluids.
- Know that surgical masks are not tested against specific microorganisms and do not prevent specific diseases.
- Never reuse, wash or disinfect surgical masks.
- Never share surgical masks with others.
- Place used or soiled masks into a tied plastic bag to prevent dripping.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub after handling.

### How do I know which surgical mask to choose?

- Should be labeled as surgical, laser, isolation, dental, or medical procedure masks
- Should help protect against microorganisms, body fluids, and large particles in the air



## Frequently Asked Questions

- Should not be sized for individual fit, it should cover the mouth and nose loosely
- Should help prevent exposure to the wearer's saliva and respiratory secretions
- Should be made of soft materials and comfortable to wear
- Should be packaged in boxes of single-use masks

### What about non-medical masks?

There are a variety of masks available for various occupational exposures that are not for medical use and are not regulated by FDA. Many of them are for filtering out particles of dust and mist from wood, metal, and masonry work. Non-medical masks are available from many sources including hardware stores and online.

### How do I know when to use it?

CDC (the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) makes recommendations on infection control measures. These may include advice on use of surgical masks. For more information about CDC's recommendations see [CDC's Infection Control Guidelines](#).

A prescription is not needed to buy surgical masks. They can be obtained from pharmacies, medical suppliers and other internet sources.

### References and Sources of Additional Information

- U.S. Food and Drug Administration: [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- Pandemic Flu: [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)