

Facts:

from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment



About masks and respirators



An important message from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Neither a facemask nor a respirator will provide complete protection from a virus.

To reduce the chances of becoming infected during a pandemic, people will need to practice a combination of simple actions:

- wash hands often with soap and water
- stay away from other people when they are ill
- avoid crowds and gatherings

You should consider wearing a facemask during a flu pandemic if ...

- you are sick with the flu and think you might have close contact - about 6 feet - with other people.
- you live with someone who has the flu symptoms, and therefore might be in the early stages of infection.
- you are well and do not expect to be in close contact with a sick person, but you will be spending time in a crowded public place and may be around infected people. During a pandemic, limit the amount of time you spend in crowded places and consider wearing a facemask while you are there.



What is a pandemic?

You may have heard the term “epidemic,” referring to an outbreak of a contagious disease that spreads rapidly and widely.

A flu “pandemic” happens when a new flu virus appears around the world. Because it is new, there is little natural immunity to the virus, and the disease can spread easily from person to person. The virus will spread mostly by close contact (within about 6 feet) with individuals who are infected, and mostly through coughing and sneezing. Because the virus will be new to people, everyone will be at risk of getting it.

We have no way to know in advance how severe the infection from a flu virus will be in a pandemic, or when it could occur.

You should consider wearing a respirator during an influenza pandemic if...



- you are well and expect to be in close contact - within about 6 feet - with people who are known or thought to be sick with pandemic flu. Limit the amount of time you are in close contact with these people and wear a respirator during this time.
- you are taking care of a sick person at home. If a respirator is unavailable, consider using a mask.

What are facemasks?

Facemasks are loose-fitting, disposable masks that cover your nose and mouth. These include masks labeled as surgical, dental, medical procedure, isolation and laser masks.



Facemasks help stop droplets from being spread by the person wearing them. They also keep splashes or sprays from reaching the mouth and nose of the person wearing the facemask. They are not designed to protect you against breathing in very small particles.

Use a facemask only once. After using, throw it away in the trash and wash your hands.

What are respirators?

A respirator is a filtering mask that is designed to protect you from breathing in very small particles, even as small as viruses.

A respirator labeled “N95” means the filter on the respirator screens out 95 percent of the particles as small as 0.3 microns - that is 0.0000117 of an inch, so these respirators will filter particles so small that they only can be seen with an electron microscope. The filter and fit to your face together determine how well a respirator works. N95 respirators are used in construction and other jobs that involve dust and small particles. Health care workers, such as nurses and doctors, also use respirators when taking care of patients with diseases that can be spread through the air.

To be most effective, respirators need to fit tightly to your face so that all air that you breathe passes through the filter material. For workplace safety, respirators are fitted to each individual, which is not easily done at home. Respirators are not designed to fit people with small faces - such as children - or for people with facial hair.

N95 and respirators that filter even smaller particles, such as N100 masks that filter 100 percent of particles, are less comfortable to wear than facemasks. It is more difficult to breathe through a respirator filter. If you have a heart or lung disease, such as asthma, or certain other health conditions, you may have trouble breathing through a respirator.

Like surgical masks, most N95 respirators should be worn only once and then thrown away in the trash. Always wash your hands before and after wearing a mask.

For more information on the proper use and removal of masks and respirators, visit www.pandemicflu.gov/vaccine/mask.html.



Reliable sources of information

Colorado HELP hotline

877-462-2911 (toll-free)
M-F 7 a.m.-11 p.m.; S-S 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m.



Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

www.cdphe.state.co.us/epr
303-692-2700

Ready Colorado

800-639-READY (7323)
www.readycolorado.com

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

www.pandemicflu.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/flu
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
888-232-6348 (TTY)
cdcinfo@cdc.gov



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06/07