

Cloth Face Coverings for Children During COVID-19

To protect ourselves and others from COVID-19, the CDC now recommends cloth face coverings be used when outside. But what about children? Read on for answers to some frequently asked questions about cloth face coverings and children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why are people wearing cloth face coverings right now?

Since so many people who have COVID-19 don't have symptoms, wearing cloth face coverings reduces the chance of transmitting the virus through the spray of spit or respiratory droplets. This is especially true for when someone with COVID-19 comes within 6 feet of you, which is the range of transmitting infection through acts like sneezing or coughing.

Should children wear cloth face coverings?

Children under the age of 2 years should **not** wear cloth face coverings.

When do children need to wear cloth face coverings?

There are places where children should wear cloth face coverings. This includes places where they may not be able to avoid staying 6 feet away from others. For example, if you have to take them to the doctor, pharmacy, or grocery store.

However, there are other places where children do NOT need to wear a cloth face covering:

- At home, assuming they have not been exposed to anyone with COVID-19.
- Outside, as long as they can stay at least 6 feet away from others and can avoid touching surfaces. For example, it's fine to take a walk as long as your children stay 6 feet away from others and do not touch tables, water fountains, playground equipment or other things that infected people might have touched.

Caution: you may need to reconsider the use of cloth face coverings if:

- The face coverings are a possible choking or strangulation hazards to your child.
- Wearing the cloth face covering causes your child to touch their face more frequently than not wearing it.

Staying home and physical distancing is still the best way to protect your family from COVID-19. Especially for younger children who may not understand why they can't run up toward other people or touch things they shouldn't, it's best to keep them home. Children who are sick (fever, cough, congestion, runny nose, diarrhea, or vomiting) should not leave home.

What if my child is scared of wearing a face covering?

It's understandable that children may be afraid of cloth face coverings at first. Here are a few ideas to help make them seem less scary:

- Look in the mirror with the face coverings on and talk about it.
- Put a cloth face covering on a favorite stuffed animal.

- Decorate them so they're more personalized and fun.
- Show your child pictures of other children wearing them.
- Draw one on their favorite book character.
- Practice wearing the face covering at home to help your child get used to it.

For children under 3, it's best to answer their questions simply in language they understand. If they ask about why people are wearing cloth face coverings, explain that sometimes people wear them when they are sick, and when they are all better, they stop wearing them.

For children over 3, try focusing on germs. Explain that germs are special to your own body. Some germs are good and some are bad. The bad ones can make you sick. Since we can't always tell which are good or bad, the cloth face coverings help make sure you keep those germs away from your own body.

One of the biggest challenges with having children wear cloth face coverings relates to them "feeling different" or stereotyping them as being sick. As more people wear these cloth face coverings, children will get used to them and not feel singled out or strange about wearing them.

What about children with special health care needs?

- Children who are considered high-risk or severely immunocompromised are encouraged to wear an N95 mask for protection.
- Families of children at higher risk are encouraged to use a standard surgical mask if they are sick to prevent the spread of illness to others.
- Children with severe cognitive or respiratory impairments may have a hard time tolerating a cloth face covering. For these children, special precautions may be needed.

Is there a "right way" to wear a cloth face covering?

Yes. Place the cloth face covering securely over the nose and mouth and stretch it from ear to ear. Remember to wash your hands before and after you wear it and avoid touching it once it's on your face. When back inside, avoid touching the front of the face covering by taking it off from behind. Cloth face coverings should not be worn when eating or drinking.

Wash cloth face coverings after each wearing.

What kind of cloth face covering is best?

Homemade or purchased cloth face coverings are fine for most people to wear. For children, the right fit is important. Pleated face coverings with elastic are likely to work best for kids. Adult cloth face coverings are usually 6x12 inches, and even a child-sized 5x10 inch covering may be too large for small children. Try to find the right size for your child's face and be sure to adjust it for a secure fit.

Due to very limited supply now, professional grade masks like N-95 masks should be reserved for medical professionals on the front lines who have increased risk of exposure to coronavirus.