

# New Guidance on Face Masks and COVID-19

Masks with valves don't stop the virus, the CDC warns

By Nancy Cleeland

August 14, 2020

**N**ew information and guidance have emerged on how face masks prevent the spread of COVID-19 and which ones provide the best protection. Masks with valves are ineffective; neck gaiters, worn around the neck and pulled up over the mouth and nose when needed, may not work either. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also discourages the use of clear plastic face shields as a substitute for masks. Despite some pushback, face masks are now mandated in many states (<https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/facing-your-face-mask-duties-a-list-of-31163/>) and are required for entry by most major retailers and in public areas by many employers. *SHRM Online* has gathered information from a variety of sources to keep you up-to-date on this evolving topic.

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### From South Carolina, New Evidence that Face Masks Work

A natural experiment has been rolling out in South Carolina, where local governments took mixed positions on mandating the use of masks. During the four weeks after mask ordinances were passed, areas with mask mandates saw an average 15.1 percent decrease in new cases while those without mask requirements saw a 30 percent increase. "This new data shows us what we already knew, wearing face masks works," State Epidemiologist Linda Bell said in a statement.

(*The State* (<https://www.thestate.com/news/coronavirus/article244901937.html>))

### Use of Face Masks Is Critical Indoors

A consensus statement on face masks developed by the Association of American Medical Colleges with leading experts in public health emphasized the importance of wearing face coverings when indoors. "Superspreader events, in which an infected individual causes many subsequent infections, are likely to occur indoors," the association said. "All businesses open to the public, no matter how limited, should insist all customers be masked while indoors." Indoors, masks should be worn even if people are more than six feet apart. In contrast, when outdoors, masks are unnecessary "if an individual does not reasonably expect to come within six feet of others."

(Association of American Medical Colleges (<https://www.aamc.org/covidroadmap/masks>))

### Masks with Valves Don't Stop the Virus

Masks with valves were made for construction workers, blocking dust from coming in while allowing the worker to easily breathe out through small holes. The system may be what you want when tearing out a kitchen for remodeling, but the valve defeats the purpose when you're trying to slow the spread of a virus. A mask with a valve doesn't prevent the virus from spreading to others—which is the primary reason for wearing one these days—but it has become a popular pandemic accessory because of its seemingly high-tech design. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated its guidance to clarify that it "does not recommend using masks for source control if they have an exhalation valve or vent."

(*The Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/08/13/cdc-mask-guidance-masks-valves/>))

### Face Shields Are Unproven

Clear plastic face shields are intended to protect the eyes, not to keep a highly contagious virus from escaping, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes in its latest guidance. "There is currently not enough evidence to support the effectiveness of face shields for source control. Therefore, CDC does not currently recommend use of face shields as a substitute for masks." However, the agency notes that some individuals might not be able to wear a face mask. In such cases, consider using a face shield that wraps around the sides of the wearer's face and extends below the chin or a hooded face shield.

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>))

### Controversy on Gaiters

Neck gaiters, made of thin, stretchy material that can be worn around the neck and pulled up when needed, are increasingly popular alternatives to face masks. A recent study spurred ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/mask-test-duke-covid/2020/08/10/4f2bb888-db18-11ea-b205-ff838e15a9a6\\_story.html?](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/mask-test-duke-covid/2020/08/10/4f2bb888-db18-11ea-b205-ff838e15a9a6_story.html?)) headlines (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/suzannerowankelleher/2020/08/11/neck-gaiters-do-not-curb-covid-19-study-finds/#53204c9e204d>) suggesting that neck gaiters may be worse than wearing no mask at all for controlling the spread of COVID-19. But the actual study, published Aug. 7 in *Science Advances*, wasn't that conclusive

(<https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/early/2020/08/07/sciadv.abd3083>), nor was it designed to be, according to *Science News*. Follow-up research found gaiters can work as well as homemade masks, especially if they are double layered. "Overall, tests of fabric masks have shown that two layers are better than one, and that a snug fitting mask with no gaps is best."

(*Science News* (<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/coronavirus-covid19-neck-gaiters-masks-droplets-study>), *New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/17/well/live/coronavirus-gaiters-masks.html>))

### Airlines Get Specific on Mask Types

Airlines have required passengers to wear face masks for months. Now they are getting increasingly specific about which masks passengers must wear, and most are banning the use of masks with valves. American Airlines is the latest to announce that vented face masks won't be permitted as of Aug. 19. Here's a roundup of airline mask requirements.

(*USA Today* (<https://www.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/travel/airline-news/2020/05/05/coronavirus-these-airlines-require-passengers-wear-face-masks/3085794001/>))

### 18 Face Masks We Actually Like to Wear

We'll be wearing them for a while, so here are some favorite cloth coverings for running, walking and going to work from the team at *Wired*.  
(*Wired* (<https://www.wired.com/gallery/best-face-masks/>))

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