



National Indian Health Board NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

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Cloth vs. Surgical vs. N95 vs. KN95: What's the Difference?

The spread of COVID-19 occurs via airborne particles and droplets. Masks are needed to prevent American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) from getting and spreading SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, to friends, families, and others. Masks work best when worn correctly and consistently. Some types of masks provide greater levels of protection than others. The most commonly used masks are cloth, surgical, N95, and KN95.

Any mask is better than no mask, but the fit is critical.

The fit: Masks should completely cover your nose and mouth, fit tightly against the side of your face, and should not have gaps to form a seal. They should have a nose wire to prevent air from leaking from the top of the mask. Masks should be comfortable.

AI/ANs, two years or older, who are not fully vaccinated should wear a mask in indoor public places such as an indoor potluck or drum circle, grocery stores, and health care facilities. In general, people do not need to wear a mask in outdoor settings if they are vaccinated; however, in areas with a high number of COVID-19 cases, masks are recommended in crowded outdoor locations such as lacrosse or community celebrations.



Cloth Masks

Cloth masks should have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric. Cloth masks can be made from various fabrics but should block light when held up to bright light and not be made of less breathable fabrics. Cloth masks are reusable, and layering a cotton mask on top of a surgical mask provides more protection than cloth alone. Well-fitting cloth face coverings effectively slow the spread of COVID-19.



The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that cloth masks should have three layers of breathable fabric, including:

- an inner layer of absorbent material, such as cotton
- a middle layer of non-woven, non-absorbent material, such as polypropylene
- an outer layer of non-absorbent material, such as polyester or polyester blend

Do NOT wear cloth masks with:

- gaps around the sides of the face or nose
- exhalation valves, vents, or other openings
- single-layer fabric or those made of thin fabric that doesn't block light

Surgical Masks

Surgical masks fit more loosely meaning air can leak in and out of the edges and still pose a risk of spreading disease. This kind of mask can filter up to 95% of droplets released in the air from people talking, coughing, sneezing, and breathing. People can find disposable surgical masks at most stores. According to FDA, surgical masks can block large-particle droplets, splashes, sprays, or splatter that may contain germs (viruses and bacteria), protecting your mouth and nose. Surgical masks also help reduce the risk you are spreading germs to others.



Tip: to prevent air from leaking around the edges of the mask, wear a fitter or a brace over a surgical or cloth mask.

N95 Masks or N95 Respirators

The N95 respirator is the best protector against respiratory infections and very efficient filtration of airborne particles. N95 respirators are perfect for healthcare and industrial workers caring for patients with highly contagious diseases like COVID-19. It protects individuals from breathing in infectious droplets. However, these masks tend to be less comfortable and must be fitted snugly to your face to function properly. These masks can filter up to 95% of air particles and are more expensive than the other masks. It is best to wear this mask in high-risk settings like hospitals or clinics. Travelers or workers may want to use N95 respirators in crowded restaurants, airports, buses, or trains.

Do NOT Wear N95 Mask

- If you have certain types of facial hair. For individuals with facial hair:
 - trim or shave their beards close to the face
 - use a mask fitter or brace
 - wear one surgical mask under a cloth mask with several layers of fabric
- If you are a child
- If you find it hard to breathe while wearing one
- If the N95 is wet or dirty
- With a second mask including a second N95 or KN95 mask

N95 respirators are single-use, disposable devices. If a respirator is damaged or soiled, or if breathing becomes difficult, remove the respirator, discard it properly, and replace it with a new one.

KN95

Both N95 and KN95 are made from multiple layers of synthetic material, typically a plastic polymer. The difference between the two types of masks is the certification. N95 is the United States (U.S.) standard and the KN95 is the China standard. Only N95 masks are approved for healthcare use in the U.S. KN95 masks have many of the same protective properties. CDC recommends that people be cautious about purchasing KN95 in the U.S. because many are fake and do not meet NIOSH requirements.



<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/personal-protective-equipment-infection-control/n95-respirators-surgical-masks-face-masks-and-barrier-face-coverings>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/effective-masks.html>

<https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2021/08/10/covid-19-delta-variant-masks-cloth-n-95-5552408001/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/usenotices/counterfeitResp.html>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-masks>



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