



SAVING PRIVATE CITIZENS IS JUST A MASK AWAY

Wearing a protective face masks in public has become a civic duty—and an absolute must in slowing the spread of COVID-19. Until we have a tried and true vaccine, protective face masks may well be our country's best non-injectable alternative.

Given the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation projection that 33,000 American lives would be saved if our citizens simply wore masks (between June 24th and October 1st)—we must consider it reckless endangerment to do otherwise.

A simple ask for a remarkable return.

While there may be different recommendation and mandates in various communities, our nation's trusted advisor, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), specifically recommends wearing mouth and nose coverings in a public setting when exposed to people who do not live in the same households. This is of particular importance when maintaining a six-foot distance is unattainable or unpredictable.

High Touch – High Risk

The way in which a person wears, removes and stores their face covering can play a big part in its effectiveness. For example, manipulating masks with hands that have touched other surfaces (i.e. a steering wheel, door handles, grocery carts, purse or wallets) can defeat mask wearing efforts. Minimal handling of protective face masks will ensure optimal protection.

Do's & Don'ts

It's important to keep some simple habits in mind to maximize your protection. Here are a few tips for donning, adjusting, and removing your face mask:

- Use your pinky-fingers to position, remove, or adjust face masks, rather than your pinching fingers that are more frequently used (i.e. thumb, index middle fingers).
- Adjust face masks nearest the ears. Keep hands away from front surfaces, particularly the nose and mouth.

- If your mask tends to slide south during wear, seek a tighter fitting mask to avoid extra handling, and always use “pinky finger” technique to reposition.
- If you need to remove the mask momentarily, reposition below chin, rather than completely removing it.
- If you need to remove your mask for longer periods of time, use a color-coded or marked zip-lock bag for “used mask” storage. Similarly, be sure to keep your clean masks in a color coded or marked “clean mask” zip lock bag. Do not put unwrapped masks in your pockets, purses, on car seats or inside cup holders.
- Plastic face shields can add an additional layer of protection. They do not replace masks.
- If you touch surfaces be sure to wash or sanitize your hands before handling protective face coverings.

It’s A Material Thing

When considering cloth masks, be sure to choose lighter cottons, moisture wicking and antimicrobial fabrics. Some fabrics can also offer UV protection and cooling features, like those used in athletic clothing. It’s important to be mindful of different material offerings. For example, some materials offer breathing comfort and enhanced airflow, yet those features can open up users to more risk. Masks that claim optimal airflow may be best suited for those exercising or spending several hours outdoors.

Before finalizing mask materials for homemade or store-bought masks, try to test them out before purchasing them in quantity. For example, if you can see daylight between the fibers, the weave of the fabric is too loose for optimal protection. Either way, double-masking, adding a scarf or bandana over the mask—or adding an inner filter-liner will add another layer of protection from inhalants and aerosolized droplets.

A plastic shield can also be worn in addition to a mask for additional protection. Face shields, however, should never be worn as a mask replacement as they cannot offer inhalant protection. Regardless of mask style or fabric used, protective shields offer an additional layer of protection for both mask-wearers and those nearby.

These days, there seems to be a plethora of [protective cloth masks](#) on the market. From an Avocado Green Mattress Company to Old Navy and Vista Print, everyone seems to be capitalizing on this essential commodity.

Going Beyond Face

Of course, COVID 19 safeguards expand beyond protective face coverings. Social distancing, handwashing, and managing groceries, packages and mail are just a few of the things that have become a part of daily practice consideration.

Fortunately, behaviors that were once thought to be offensive, like refusing to shake hands, are now viewed as usual and customary during the pandemic. Instead, prayer hands and a bow of the head and respectful salutes have replaced handshakes, fist bumps and the novel elbow knock.

Using barriers, like a tissue and over-gloves to open doors – or the bottom of a water bottle to push elevator floor buttons have also proven to be quite effective. Likewise, straws, disposable silverware and mini cups allow individuals to enjoy snacks with less handling.

Speaking of food, grocery stores are adopting occupancy limits while utilizing directional floor signs to keep shoppers moving in the same directional flow with the hope of keeping visitors behind their back at 6-feet apart. Whether the shopper is physically at the store or using a pickup up or delivery services, wiping down boxes, jars and containers to minimize potential contamination has become a universal smart step in shopping routines. Similarly, mail, bulk shipments are being handled in the same manner as groceries. Additionally, non-urgent or temperature sensitive packages can be set aside to delay immediate handling.

Staying safe on the road is important too. Don't be fooled by our roads appearing to be safer because less people are driving around. As soon as more people get back on the road, there may be a big jump in the number of cars out there. Be it driving or flying, or simply opting to drive your own car rather than commuting with others, the numbers are sure to increase. Drive safe.

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