



Information on the use of surgical masks

Should I wear a surgical mask?

Most people will not benefit from wearing a surgical mask. Masks are of benefit to people who are sick so they don't cough on others, and health care workers who have frequent, close contact with sick people.

General public

Surgical masks in the community are only helpful in preventing people who have coronavirus disease from spreading it to others. If you are well, you do not need to wear a surgical mask as there is little evidence supporting the widespread use of surgical masks in healthy people to prevent transmission in public.

Specific requirements are in place for people who have returned from a country or region that is at high or moderate risk for COVID-19, or think may they have been in close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus. Go to www.health.gov.au/covid19-travellers for the list of at-risk countries and isolation requirements.

If you are required to isolate, you should use a surgical mask (if you have one) in the following circumstances:

- You need to leave your home for any reason and will be in public areas
- You are visiting a medical facility
- You have symptoms and other people are present in the same room as you.

Suspected case

If you are suspected of having coronavirus disease, your primary care provider will give you a surgical mask to wear when you enter the emergency department or general practice.

This is a precaution to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19, especially through coughing.

You should follow your primary care provider's advice on how to fit and wear the surgical mask. You should continue to use the surgical mask in all public places until you are advised otherwise by public health authorities.

If you are suspected of having coronavirus, you can find more information at www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources.

Confirmed case

If you are confirmed to have coronavirus disease, follow the advice of your primary care provider and public health authorities on wearing a surgical mask. You should wear a surgical mask if you need to leave the house; when you are in contact with health care workers; or, when other people are in the same room. If your health care provider has issued you with a surgical mask, please follow their instructions regarding the safe use and appropriate disposal of masks.

Health care workers

During the course of their work, health care workers may be exposed to patients who are suspected or confirmed of having COVID-19. When caring for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, health care workers are required to wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) (masks, gloves, eye shields and/or gowns) to protect themselves from infectious illnesses and help stop the spread of disease. The PPE required will depend on the

type of interaction. It is important that our health workforce remains strong and healthy during this time.

Information for health care workers looking after patients in hospitals and non-inpatients is available at www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources.

Pathology specimen collectors

Pathology specimen collectors should follow the advice for health care workers above and wear appropriate PPE when collecting specimens from confirmed or suspected cases to protect themselves and help stop the spread of the disease.

Customer service staff

Customer service staff and public officials do not need to wear a mask as there is less chance they will come into close contact with suspect or confirmed cases. All staff are required to practice social distancing and good hygiene practises.

If you feel unwell, stay at home, let your supervisor know and seek further medical advice.

How do I get a surgical mask?

If you suspect you are ill with coronavirus disease, you should seek health care from a hospital or your general practice GP, where you can also get further information on surgical masks.

The Australian Government is supporting general practices that are seeing patients with suspected coronavirus and are unable to access sufficient surgical masks. These surgical masks should be available through primary health networks (PHNs). General practices should contact their local PHN in the first instance and outline their needs.

General practices and medical practitioners are encouraged to refer to the Department of Health website which includes specific information on treating possible coronavirus patients.

How can we help prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses. You should:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser, and
- if unwell, avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres away from people).

More information

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness—not coronavirus.

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of each state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

If you have concerns about your health, speak to a doctor.