

Mask options and how to properly wear them

When it comes to masks to slow the spread of COVID-19, many options are available. Dr. John O'Horo, a Mayo Clinic infectious diseases specialist, provides a demonstration of various mask options available and how to properly wear them.

Watch: Dr. John O'Horo demonstrates wearing various mask options.

Journalists: Broadcast-quality video is available in the downloads at the end of the post. Please "Courtesy: John O'Horo, M.D./Infectious Diseases/Mayo Clinic.

"The type of mask I'm wearing right now is what's typically called a procedural mask or minimum performance mask.

It's essentially a paper mask that doesn't have a fluid shield layer in it but it's very good at filtering very small particles, which are the what we think transmit COVID-19.

This is the kind of mask that protects everyone around me as a source mask very well and does provide me with some protection.

Now in the health care setting, we start to see a different kinds of masks called ASTM rated masks like this one here.

They have typically they have different colors, and they have a fluid shield in them that protects you from splash or spray. Those ones are perfectly fine to use in this setting, that fluid shield does protect from a close-range sneeze, for example, but they're not strictly necessary in all settings.

Wearing a mask that has a good fit is more important than anything else.

This is a surgical mask. Surgical masks typically have tied back ear loops. And these kinds of masks are used in operating rooms everywhere. They're very adjustable for comfort for long procedures, just make sure you have a good fit. And you can do that for an entire period in the operating room. I find your loops more convenient, but that's more of a choice. These are perfectly adequate masks.

Now this is a KN95. The K stands for Korean. It's a Korean certified version, not the N95 masks that are used in healthcare. There are some issues with these where there's a lot of products on the market that are sold as KN95 that are not KN95. I always advise a little bit of caution in relying on these.

Having said that, these work reasonably well, especially if they're worn properly. In the healthcare setting, we're only using N95 masks during what we call aerosol generating procedures. And part of that is because wearing a true respirator requires a tight fit. It's uncomfortable to wear for prolonged period so it's very easy to let it slip down. And

that's more dangerous than wearing a different mask that might have a little bit less filtration but is being worn consistently improperly.

Now, I'm in a socially distance setting. I'm going to remove my mask and show the proper way to do this. When you're wearing a mask, one of these fluid-rated masks, you want to keep the colored side out. The specific color doesn't matter.

Some manufacturers use different color coding to indicate what they are. But if you do see a color typically that's the fluid shield layer that should be filter out. You want to hold the mask by the edges or by the ear loops and put it over each ear. And then bring it down underneath your chin and over your nose holding by the edges and pinch that right at the nose.

Then as you're just feeling around, you should not feel a lot of air escape, you don't feel a big jet going in your eye. If you're wearing glasses, you shouldn't be seeing fog. If you are just pinch and readjust for that. Some people, depending on face shape, find that putting a twist in here can help with bringing that up on the side and up around the other side. And that can give you a better fit.

Now when you take the mask off, try to avoid touching the main part here because that's where all of the droplets and particles may have landed. You try to just put that down or dispose of it in the same way.

Now, for the KN95 or N95 masks, you're going to try to hold it by the edges, bring it over and then pinch around to get a good fit. Then you want to hold your hands around it and make sure you're holding the mask tight, and you breathe in. You feel sucking around your face. That's telling you that you're getting that good filtration. And then, you want to put your hands around and breathe out.

And I felt air escape here and here for me, for example. That tells me I want to adjust it until I feel that it's mostly if not exclusively going through that mask. Now, because these ones are a little harder to breathe through and a little harder to wear properly, I again encourage these more for medical professionals and other professionals who are experienced with wearing them. But they do provide a very good degree of protection.

I'm going to switch back to a different mask now though, because this one is a little harder to talk through. I'm going to just take it off, try again not to touch the front of it, and then put it down face down if I'm going to plan on wearing that again. If these masks aren't visibly soiled, and you've only worn them for a couple of minutes, or in within the same day that's a perfectly reasonable thing to do depending on what kind of tasks here you're doing."

Along with masking, Dr. O'Horo advises everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated and boosted.