



GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF MASKS FOR THE PUBLIC IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Guidance on the use of medical masks for the Public in the context of COVID-19

Background:

This is a guidance on the appropriate use of facial masks for the public to reduce the transmission of the COVID-19 infection in Qatar. This guidance is **NOT** intended for the Healthcare Workers and Staff in Healthcare settings.

Current information suggests that the route of human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 is either via respiratory droplets or direct contact with infected people or fomites. Any person who is within 2 meters (in close contact) of someone who is infected with Covid-19 coronavirus who has respiratory symptoms (coughing, sneezing or even speaking) is at risk of being exposed to potentially infective respiratory droplets.

Wearing a medical mask can be one of the preventive measures that can limit the spread of certain respiratory diseases, including COVID-19 coronavirus. However, the use of a mask alone is not sufficient to provide adequate level of protection, and other preventive measures should also be adopted. If masks are used, they must be combined with hand hygiene and other measures **(mentioned below in section A)** to prevent human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 infection.

General Preventive Measures to protect yourself and others from the COVID-19 infection:

- Stay at home and avoid going out unless it is necessary
- Keep at least two-meter distance between yourself and others (this includes your family members and household workers)
- Wash your hands with soap and water regularly for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, disinfect your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- When coughing and sneezing, cover your nose and mouth with a clean tissue and immediately dispose in a closed trash bin and wash your hands. If a tissue is not available, you cough or sneeze in the sleeve of your arm
- Avoid crowded places, gatherings and social visits
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes particularly when you are outside
- Avoid close contact with people who show symptoms of respiratory diseases such as coughing or sneezing
- Explain to your household workers the precautionary measures to take, and to avoid being in contact with workers outside your home

Recommendations on wearing a facial mask when you are NOT sick (without respiratory symptoms like coughing or sneezing):

The Ministry of Public Health, based WHO recommendations, does not generally advise healthy people to wear a mask to reduce their risk of COVID-19 disease when they are staying at home. However it is recommended that you wear a mask in these situations:

1. If you are in this high-risk group of people and had to go out for a necessity:
 - If you are diagnosed with a chronic disease (for example; diabetes, chronic renal disease, heart disease, chronic lung disease, cancer, immune, compromising condition, taking medications that lower your immunity)
 - Older adult (If you are 55 years old or older)
 - If you are a pregnant or breastfeeding mother
 - If you are working in public area or workplace and the nature of your work requires that you interact closely with other people (who might be a potential source of COVID-19 infection), customers or visitors. For example: if you are working as inspector, cashier, salesperson, security, hotel staff or similar jobs.
 - If you need to use public transportation like taking a taxi or a bus or riding a car with several other people
 - If you need to enter a crowded place
 - If you live or work in a locked down area/facility or share a room with other roommates

2. If you are a care giver or sharing living space with persons with symptoms suggestive of respiratory tract infection or suspected to have COVID-19
3. If you are the caregiver or sharing the same living space with someone who has chronic condition that puts them at risk for severe Covid-19 infection

Note: wearing a mask should not mean that one can stop practicing physical distancing or avoiding touching eyes or eliminate the need to sanitize hands. Masks are effective only when used in combination with the other protective measures such frequent hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer and social distancing. Also, It does not mean that it is safe to go out of your house unnecessarily.

Recommendations to wear a facial mask when you are sick (with respiratory symptoms like coughing or sneezing):

1. Wear a medical mask if you feel sick (if you have upper respiratory tract infection's symptoms like fever, coughing, runny nose, sore throat, clogged sinuses, or repeated sneezing) to minimize the risk of possible transmission to the people living with you in the same house in case you are infected with Covid-19 coronavirus.
2. Wear a mask if you have respiratory symptoms to protect your infant if you are breastfeeding
3. If you feel mildly sick, you can seek medical advice by calling: 16000 COVID-19 call center for COVID-19 related concerns or Call 999 ONLY for severe medical condition.
4. If you feel sick and need to go and see a doctor, if you are in transit to the hospital in a car, if you entered a waiting area in a clinic or hospital, or if you use public transportation (taxi or bus) to go the clinic then you **MUST** wear a medical mask to protect other people around you

Note: wearing a mask does not eliminate the need to maintain physical distancing or avoid touching eyes or not needing to sanitize hands. Masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

How to put on, use, take off and dispose of a mask:

1. Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water. Inspect the mask to ensure that it is not defective before wearing. Handle the mask only from the side strings or elastic bands. Don't touch the fabric of the mask.
2. Cover mouth and nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask. The side with a metal inside it should be on top. The colored side of the mask is usually the outside of it
3. Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water. Also avoid touching your eyes when wearing a mask
4. Mask may be used for 1-3 days depending on how much of the time it is worn, and as long as it maintains its integrity and remains dry.
5. To remove the mask: remove it from behind (do not touch the front of mask). Clean your hands with soap and water after removing the mask. When the mask is not reusable anymore discard immediately in a closed bin; clean hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water.

References

1. Advice on the use of masks in the community, during home care, and in health care settings in the context of COVID-19. WHO, Interim guidance 19 March 2020.
2. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>
3. <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/personal-protective-equipment-infection-control/masks-and-n95-respirators>
4. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2020/03/12/china-and-south-korea-models-seem-like-only-way-to-contain-covid-19/#16c0f3d047d3>



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