



April 8, 2020

**HEALTH ADVISORY: COVID-19 AND THE USE OF CLOTH FACE COVERINGS**

New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) continues to study and respond to the spread and effects of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes the COVID-19 disease.

Recent studies have shown that a significant portion of individuals infected with the virus are asymptomatic. Asymptomatic individuals, even if they eventually develop symptoms, can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people in close proximity — for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing — even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms at the time.

Considering this new evidence, NYSDOH supports members of the public who choose to wear cloth face coverings in public settings, where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies), **especially** in areas of significant community transmission.

It is important to emphasize that maintaining social distancing, by staying at least 6 feet apart when in public and staying home whenever possible, is critical to slow the spread of the virus, even if wearing a face covering. While cloth face coverings may not prevent the wearer from becoming infected, they might help slow spread from people who have the virus and are unaware.

Cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low-cost, can be used as an additional, voluntary public health measure, beyond the recommended social distancing. Surgical masks and N-95 respirators are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other first responders.

When wearing cloth face coverings, New Yorkers should:

- Make sure that they fit snugly and cover their nose and mouth.
- Be changed frequently and laundered when they are soiled or wet.
- Not become complacent with other protective measures.
  - Do not touch the cloth covering or face.
  - Continue to be vigilant with thorough and frequent hand washing.
    - Soap and water, or alcohol-based hand sanitizer of 60%+ alcohol.
  - Practice respiratory etiquette and cover your coughs or sneezes.
  - Practice social distancing – even when wearing masks.
  - Stay home and help flatten the curve!

Visit NYSDOH COVID-19 webpage for more information at: <https://www.ny.gov/coronavirus>.