

Instructions on the use of protective masks

According to the Ministry of Health's Regulation No. [1051/2020](#), which came into force on 31.10.2020 and is valid until and including 17.11.2020, meetings, workplaces and other operations shall ensure that it is possible to have at least 2 metres between individuals who are not closely linked. In situations where it is not possible to ensure a distance of 2 metres between individuals, a face mask must be used that covers the nose and mouth. In addition, face masks shall be used in public transport, in shops and other services.

- **Children born in 2011 and later are exempt from the obligation to wear a face mask.**
- **The use of a face mask reduces the likelihood of droplets from the wearer's respiratory tract (which may contain the COVID-19 virus) from being released into the air, and a protective mask may also reduce the likelihood of the individual inhaling such droplets from others. Thus, face masks reduce the risk of infection.**
- **Face masks never replace general infection prevention measures that shall always be used, i.e. maintaining distance limits, washing or spraying hands after contact with contaminated surfaces, being careful when coughing and sneezing and cleaning contact surfaces in the surrounding area.**

Face masks that cover the mouth and nose should always be worn in:

- Shops and other services.
- Coaches, public transport (bus) and taxis.
- Airports, on planes for both domestic and international flights and on passenger ferries.

Face masks should be used when the distance of 2 metres cannot be followed:

- For healthcare services
- For law enforcement
- In school work (in primary schools, except for children in grades 1–4, upper secondary schools and universities). Applies to students, staff and guests. The children may take off the face mask when eating, even though it is not always possible to maintain the distance limits, but it should be ensured that the ventilation is as good as possible in the meantime. For further information, please see [questions and answers](#) on the website of the Ministry of Education and Culture.
- During ceremonies, e.g. funerals.
- In music schools, where possible, for students and staff. Guests shall wear face masks and maintain distance limits.

Exemptions from the use of face masks

- **Those who have previously had COVID-19** do not have to wear a face mask but must be willing to explain it to others. They can print out from “My pages” on Heilsuvera a confirmation that they have had COVID-19 and use it as a certificate to show employers or schools and where it is requested.
- **Those who do not have the understanding or maturity to use face masks correctly** do not need to use face masks, e.g. young children or people with developmental disabilities – improper use of face masks can be even more harmful than wearing a face mask.
- As the risk of infection is much lower in the open air than indoors, **children do not have to wear face masks when playing outdoors**. However, the rules that each school sets itself must be followed.

Health reasons

- There can be various health reasons why people cannot wear a face mask, e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder, severe anxiety, claustrophobia, disability, sensory processing problems, developmental disabilities, autism, hearing loss (use sign language), severe shortness of breath or other. In such cases, people must be prepared to show certificates to employers or schools; such certificates should be available at a health centre or from the treating physician.
- It would be safest if these individuals tried to find a face mask made of a material that they can use (e.g. from a soft material), or instead of a face mask, they could try to wear a transparent face shield. Such shields do not provide the same protection as face masks because they do not filter the air that the person breathes in or out, but they can prevent drops from landing on the face and also prevent the person from touching their face.
- Those who cannot wear face masks should avoid being in a crowd, take special care to stay a good distance away from others and stay at home as much as possible.

The most stringent hygiene measures must be taken when using face masks

The purpose of face masks is to capture respiratory droplets from the person wearing the mask to ensure that such droplets are less likely to be dispersed into the environment. As a result, used face masks are extremely contaminated with microbes that are commonly found in saliva and also by what could come from the respiratory tract (e.g. cold viruses, SARS CoV-2 or other). Therefore, the most stringent hygiene measures must be used. Face masks should be touched as little as possible and must be changed if damp or damaged in any manner. It is best to touch only the straps and the outer edge of the face mask when removing it and place it directly in general waste. Hands must always be washed or sanitised after touching used face masks.

It is best to use disposable face masks, which are discarded after use into general waste. Wash hands or use hand sanitiser after contact with the face mask. If the face mask is used for a short time and is to be used again, it must be stored in a clean bag or container until the next use and touched as little as possible when it is put back on. Disinfect your hands afterwards. Keep in mind that traditional face masks are manufactured as disposable products, but if nothing happens during use and they have not become damp, it is okay to use them for up to 4 hours; this must be evaluated each time.

Reusable face masks can also be used, in public, but they must be made of a washable material and must be washed at a minimum of 60°C daily. The same rules apply to reusable masks as apply to disposable masks. Their exterior becomes contaminated with use, and they should be touched as little as possible. Wash or disinfect your hands after touching the mask. Store them in a clean bag or container between use and until washing.

Keep in mind:

- Damp and contaminated face masks are useless and can increase the risk of infection.
- A face mask that does not cover both mouth and nose is useless.

What type of face masks are used to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Disposable “surgery masks” with elastic at the sides and built-in wire to shape it to the nose

These masks are made of three layers of paper-like material, and in the middle is a layer that filters particles. These face masks are of different thicknesses, absorb different amounts of moisture and have different filtration properties. These types of face masks catch droplets coming from the respiratory tract and the saliva of the wearer, so they are less likely to spread to others and the environment. They also reduce the chance that the person wearing the mask will get the virus.

Hands need to be cleaned before the surgery mask is put on and after it is touched or removed. The surgery mask shall be tight to the face; cover the nose, mouth and chin; and care should be taken not to touch the mask on the face. The surgery mask needs to be replaced when it has become damp or damaged. The maximum use time is 4 hours. Used masks shall be disposed of in general use rubbish bins.

[Safe use of surgery masks – poster](#)

Reusable face masks (cloth masks)

They can be bought or sewn at home. [A workshop agreement](#) on face masks has been published by the European standards organisation CEN, with the participation of an Icelandic representative. It defines the requirements for the production of face masks, testing, use and washing, as well as instructions on home-made face masks. Such face masks are suitable for the general public; they can reduce the spread of the virus to others from those who wear the mask, as long as it does not have a valve that lets unfiltered air out. The reusable face mask does not absolve the user from paying attention to the distance limits. There are many different types of reusable face masks, but they need to cover the nose, mouth and chin; be tight to the face; be multi-layered (at least two layers and preferably three layers), and be made of a material that can be washed preferably at 60°C. Close woven material can be used, and between the outer and inner layers, there shall be a layer (or two) of thicker material. Materials used in such face masks must allow air to pass through, be sufficiently soft and flexible to provide sealing to the face, not be too hot, not be irritating and not be resistant to washing at 60°C. Hands need to be cleaned before the face is put on and after it is touched or removed. At a minimum, a reusable face mask must be washed daily.

CEN emphasises:

- Reusable face masks do not protect against chemicals.

- Reusable face masks cannot be frozen to remove contaminants. Viral or bacterial material remains and does not lose its ability to infect with freezing.
- The reusable face mask does not absolve the user from paying attention to the distance limits.
- It is not recommended to boil reusable face masks at 100°C unless the manufacturer specifically recommends it; it is unlikely that the material can withstand this.

Face masks with exhalation valves

The purpose of a face mask is to prevent airborne droplets from reaching others. If face masks have a one-way valve or an air hole that releases unfiltered air, droplets that the person wearing the mask exhales can be transmitted to others. Such a face mask therefore does not reduce the risk of infection from a person with COVID-19 to others. The Chief Epidemiologist does not recommend the use of a face mask with a valve.

REMEMBER!

A face mask is not useful if it is worn on the neck, forehead, nose, under the nose, under the chin, dangling on the ear or on the arm.

Face shield/cover

Transparent plastic covers that cover the face are primarily intended to protect the eyes of those wearing such covers. They can prevent droplets from landing on the face and also prevent the person from touching their face. They are made of different materials and different shapes but should reach from the forehead to well below the chin. These covers are open at the bottom and sides and do not prevent the spread of droplets during coughing or sneezing and therefore do not provide the same protection as a mask. Hands must be cleaned before and after removing the cover, and the plastic cover itself should not be touched. The face shield must be washed with soap and water or disinfected after use, if reused. Healthcare professionals treating COVID-19 patients who are wearing a face shield shall wear a mask underneath.

The face of the person wearing the face shield is visible, and they do not obstruct speech, so they could be used in certain situations. Those who are unable to wear a face mask due to health reasons or due to deafness, and who use a face shield instead, should wear a shield that goes well over the sides of the face and down to the chin or use a shield with a hood.

Protective respirator masks (fine-particle masks FFP2, (N95), FFP3, (N99))

Such masks are specially designed for use by healthcare professionals caring for people with diseases transmitted by airborne infections, e.g. COVID-19 patients, as airway intervention may be required and there may be a risk of droplets and mist from the patient. Such masks must be fitted to the person in question to ensure that the correct size is used. These masks do not need to be used in society.
