



## Understanding the mask debate: Suggested talking points

- **High-quality masks can protect you against COVID-19.**
  - COVID-19 spreads through particles, including droplets and aerosols.
  - Studies have shown that masks reduce the number of particles you inhale and the number of particles you emit.
  - The quality of the mask matters. N95 masks work best against both droplets and aerosols, while surgical and cloth masks don't work as well against aerosols.
  - The fit of the mask matters. Masks become less effective when there are leaks that give particles a chance to enter and exit.
- **It's less clear whether masks have helped slow the spread of COVID-19 at the community level.**
  - It's difficult to study the effectiveness of masks at the community level because not everyone wears them and those who do may not wear them properly.
  - Studies have found a [range](#) of [effectiveness](#) of masks against COVID-19, and the authors of the Cochrane review conclude that they are "uncertain" about whether masks slow the spread of respiratory viruses.
  - The Cochrane review acknowledges that study findings were limited by the fact that "relatively low numbers of people" followed mask guidance.
- **Masking is just one layer of protection.**
  - High-quality masks, if worn correctly, can reduce your chances of getting infected.
  - But in the real world, perfect masking is not always possible, and many other factors can limit the effectiveness of masks.
  - That's why layering up on protective measures, including getting boosted and washing your hands, is important.
  - Assess your personal risk and make decisions that make you feel safe and comfortable.



## Understanding the mask debate: Frequently asked questions

### 1. Do masks protect me against COVID-19?

It depends. Studies have shown that masks can significantly reduce the number of COVID-19 particles you breathe in, which in turn can lower the chance that you get infected. But the degree of effectiveness also depends on the quality and fit of the mask you wear, as well as the situation that you're in. For example, if you wear a high-quality mask correctly, it can make a big difference in reducing the chance you get infected. But if you wear a cloth mask in a crowded and poorly ventilated space during a time of high COVID-19 spread, the mask's impact will be much less significant.

### 2. How can I use a mask more effectively?

First of all, it's important to wear a high-quality, well-fitting mask. N95 and KN95 masks are the best at limiting droplets and aerosols, both of which contribute to the spread of COVID-19. Make sure your mask fits snugly, as leaks between the mask and your face give particles a chance to enter and exit. It's also important to view masks as just one of many layers of protection that you can use. No prevention method—whether it be vaccines, boosters, masks, or hygiene—is 100 percent effective. That's why layering up on protective measures is your best bet at avoiding COVID-19 infection.

### 3. Why has there been so much discussion around the Cochrane review?

A lot of news coverage around the Cochrane review claims that it concluded that “masks don't work.” However, the review actually concluded that it's “uncertain” about whether masks slow the spread of respiratory viruses. The review's authors acknowledge that many of the studies they included in their analysis were limited by the fact that relatively low numbers of people followed mask guidance. Several outside scientists have also noted that the review combined studies on different respiratory viruses and settings, which made it less informative about the impact of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic specifically.