



Health agencies across the country are now acknowledging that wearing a mask is an, “important protective measure.”

The primary reason is to protect others - If you are unknowingly infected, a mask will help reduce the chance that you could spread the virus to others BUT authorities stress that masks are no substitute for physical distancing and good hygiene.

One USA study analysed the pandemic trends without face-covering and calculated that over 66,000 infections were prevented by using a face mask in little over a month in New York City. The study concluded that wearing a face mask in public corresponds to the most effective means to prevent inter-human transmission.

The attached epar Stand Up Talk provides valuable information to share with your teams on this important issue. The Stand UP talk provides the information your staff need including – Why the back flip on wearing masks by health agencies; The importance of not rejecting a mask just because you might think a mask is not 100% effective; By wearing a mask, every staff member is reducing their risk substantially; The critical issue of identifying staff with breathing difficulties or other conditions that make them exempt from wearing masks.

Tomorrow, 24 July, we will circulate another Stand UP Talk that will address the important issue of fitting a face mask.



The epar Free EHS Support Hotline is available for any environment, health and safety advice.

Call 1300 471 175
Email: info@epar.com.au
OR

Contact your epar State Manager directly

STAND-UP TALK

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Let's Talk About Wearing Facial Masks During COVID-19

Let's talk about any issues whether they be positive or negative in relation to the wearing of facial masks

THE NEW SCIENCE ABOUT THE WEARING OF MASKS

In some States as restrictions ease, and in others such as Victoria where new restrictions and public health orders have been introduced, we are all seeing more and more people wearing masks or face coverings in public.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization and Australian health authorities now recommend cloth masks for the general public, but earlier in the pandemic they recommended just the opposite.

WHY WAS THE GUIDANCE ON WEARING MASKS CHANGED?

There seems to be a number of reasons:

1. The original CDC guidance was partly based on what was thought to be low disease prevalence earlier in the pandemic, which gave us a false sense of security.
2. There was also the legitimate concern that the limited supply of surgical masks and N95 respirators should be saved for health care workers.
3. Another factor is that culturally, many western countries weren't really prepared to wear masks.

WHY THE CHANGE IN THE GUIDANCE TO NOW RECOMMENDING THE WEARING OF MASKS?

What may have finally convinced health authorities to change their guidance in favour of masks were rising disease prevalence and a clearer understanding that both pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic transmission are possible – even common.

Studies have found that viral load peaks in the days before symptoms begin and that speaking is enough to expel virus-carrying droplets.

WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE THAT WEARING A MASK IS EFFECTIVE IN PREVENTING COVID-19?

Strong evidence comes from laboratory studies of respiratory droplets and the ability of various masks to block them. An experiment using high-speed video found that hundreds of droplets ranging from 20 to 500 micrometres were generated when saying a simple phrase, but nearly all these droplets were blocked when the mouth was covered by a damp washcloth.

Another study of people who had influenza or the common cold found that wearing a surgical mask significantly reduced the amount of these respiratory viruses emitted in droplets and aerosols.

One study looked at coronavirus deaths across over 100 countries and found that those with cultural norms or government policies favouring mask-wearing had lower death rates.

Also, in one case, a man flew from China to Toronto and subsequently tested positive for COVID-19. He had a dry cough and wore a mask on the flight, and all 25 people closest to him on the flight tested negative for COVID-19. In another case, in late May, two hair stylists in Missouri had close contact with 140 clients while sick with COVID-19. Everyone wore a mask and none of the clients tested positive.

DOES THE TYPE OF MASK MATTER?

Studies have compared various mask materials, but for the general public, the most important consideration may be comfort. The best mask is one you can wear comfortably and consistently.

Surgical masks are generally more protective than cloth masks, and some people find them lighter and more comfortable to wear.

The N95 mask is very effective at preventing viral spread. These masks, when properly fitted, seal closely to the face and filter out 95% of particles 0.3 microns or larger. However, N95 masks are in serious shortage and are in demand by the medical professionals. Also, the N95 masks with the valves or openings on the front are NOT safe and may actually propel your germs further.

STAND-UP TALK



Let's Talk About Wearing Facial Masks During COVID-19

Record of EHS Stand-Up Meeting

Meeting details

Meeting held at:	Date:
Meeting conducted by:	Signed:

Persons attending

Name	Signature	Name	Signature

Action required

Action	Responsible	Timeframe

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Stand Up Talk Meeting Outline

1	FOLLOW UP	Follow-up on any outstanding issues from the previous meeting.
2	INTRODUCTION	Briefly introduce the topic (in 1-2 minutes) for employees. Let staff know that the bottom line is that any mask that covers the nose and mouth will be of benefit.
3	ADVISE	The concept is risk reduction rather than absolute prevention. You don't reject a mask just because you think a mask is not 100% effective. By wearing a mask, you are reducing your risk substantially.
4	ADVISE	Another factor to remember, is that you could still catch the virus through the membranes in your eyes, a risk that masking does not eliminate. So, it is always important to practice social distancing and try not to touch your face.
5	ASK	Does anyone have any questions?
6	THANKS	Thank everyone for their time and attention.



1. If employees work in an environment where physical distancing is not possible, consider providing them with reusable cloth masks or single use surgical masks.
2. Keeping 1.5 metres between yourself and others, and washing your hands frequently, are still the best defence against coronavirus (COVID-19).
3. Identify staff that may have an exemption from wearing a mask – those with breathing difficulties and those with physical conditions that make it hard to wear a mask or a person who is affected by a relevant medical condition – asthma, a serious skin condition on the face, a disability or a mental health condition. This also includes persons who are communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
4. Employers have a responsibility to identify whether there is a risk to the health of employees from exposure to coronavirus (COVID-19) at their workplace, as well as areas where employees are unable to maintain physical distancing by staying 1.5 metres apart.

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Use the new epar V app to help you police and manage your social distancing and COVID-19 and safety communication in the workplace.