

Wearing Mask

On 23 June 2003, the World Health Organisation removed Hong Kong from the list of areas with recent local transmission of SARS. To sustain this achievement, we must remain vigilant and take necessary measures as required.

Why wear a mask?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) can be transmitted by respiratory droplets over a short distance or through direct contact with a patient's secretions. Wearing a mask offers protection against SARS. If you have a respiratory tract infection, it also helps prevent the spread of the illness. Surgical masks, if properly worn, are effective in preventing the spread of droplet infections.

Wearing a mask is just one way to help prevent respiratory tract infections. Most important is to observe good personal hygiene. Wash hands frequently with liquid soap. Always wash hands after sneezing, coughing, cleaning the nose; going to the toilet; and before touching the eyes, nose and mouth, or preparing food. You can also build up body immunity by developing a healthy lifestyle - eat well, get plenty of rest, exercise, don't smoke.

Who should wear a mask?

- People with respiratory infection symptoms.
- People who care for patients with respiratory infection symptoms.
- People who have been in close contact with confirmed or suspected SARS patients should wear a mask for at least 10 days from the last contact.
- People visiting clinics or hospitals.
- Health care workers in clinical settings.

As this list cannot be exhaustive, members of the public are reminded to exercise judgment in accordance with guidance given above. In general, anyone who feels the need to wear a mask is advised to do so.

Points to note about wearing a mask:

- Wash hands before putting on a mask, before and after taking one off.
- Follow the instructions given by the supplier.

When wearing a surgical mask, ensure that:

- The mask fits snugly over the face.
 - The coloured side of the mask faces outwards, with the metallic strip uppermost.
 - The strings or elastic bands are positioned properly to keep the mask firmly in place.
 - The mask covers the nose, mouth and chin.

- The metallic strip moulds to the bridge of the nose.
- Try not to touch the mask once it is secured on your face as frequent handling may reduce its protection. If you must do so, wash your hands before and after touching the mask.
- When taking off the mask, avoid touching the outside of the mask as this part may be covered with germs.
- After taking off the mask, fold the mask outwards (i.e. the outside of the mask facing inwards), then put the mask into a plastic or paper bag before putting it into a rubbish bin with a lid.
- A surgical mask should be discarded after use and under no circumstances should it be used for longer than a day. Replace the mask immediately if it is damaged or soiled.

Department of Health
23 June 2003