

Recommendations on use of face masks for prevention of human swine influenza in the community setting

(This recommendation is based on the current information on human swine influenza; modification to this recommendation will be made, as necessary, as additional information becomes available. Please visit the Centre for Health Protection website for updated information www.chp.gov.hk)

1. Face mask provides a physical barrier to fluids and particulate materials. Surgical mask is a commonly used face mask.
2. If used correctly, face masks can help prevent exposures to infections transmitted by respiratory droplets. Using a mask incorrectly may actually increase the risk of transmission. For correct use of mask, please refer to: http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/Use_Mask_Properly.pdf
3. Wearing face mask alone cannot provide complete protection for human swine influenza. Face masks should be used along with other preventive measures to minimize the spread of transmission:
 - (a) Perform frequent and proper hand hygiene.
 - (b) Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
 - (c) Maintain respiratory etiquette/cough manner.
 - (d) Stay at home if got sick and minimize contact with others.
 - (e) Reduce unnecessary social contact.
4. To prepare for the surge in demand during influenza pandemic, general households should maintain several weeks' (e.g. 4 weeks) of face masks for all times.
5. People should wear a mask when:
 - (a) He / she is having respiratory infection e.g. fever, a runny nose, cough or sneeze, to protect others.
 - (b) He / she visits clinics or hospitals, or cares for patients with fever or respiratory infection for self-protection.
6. Stay away from possible sources of infection:
 - (a) Avoid close contact with people who might be ill rather than relying on the use of face masks.
 - (b) Avoid being in crowded settings. If this is necessary, minimize time spent in it. Moreover, persons with risk of influenza related complications (e.g. pregnant ladies, persons with chronic medical diseases) should consider wearing a face mask.