



UPDATED GUIDANCE ON MANDATORY USE OF CLOTH FACE MASKS BY COMMUNITY/PUBLIC

Updated January 2021



Ministry of Health (MOH) would like to provide **UPDATED** guidance to the general public on the use of face masks and other face covers in the community by individuals who are not ill in order to reduce potential asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic transmission of COVID-19. MOH has now recommended for **MANDATORY cloth face mask use in areas where local transmission is high currently and where physical distancing is not possible.** The document also provides advice on the use of masks during home care for patients with COVID-19.

The Ministry of Health strongly recommends that use of cloth masks should be mandatory in all public places for example funerals, Road traffic halls, crowded supermarkets, public transports, banking halls, attending clinics at the hospital, schools etc. Use of Cloth masks or face coverings should complement other measure like hand washing, physical distancing and limiting number of people to 50 in any gathering.

This document is an update of the guidance published on 30th April 2020 and is based on updated scientific evidence relevant to the use of masks for preventing transmission of Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as well as practical considerations. The main differences from the previous version include the following:

- Updated guidance and practical advice on the use of non-medical (cloth) masks by the general public;
- New guidance on non-medical mask features and characteristics, including choice of fabric, number and combination of layers, shape, and maintenance.

MOH would like to emphasize that health education on the use, care and disposal of the masks is paramount.

BACKGROUND

Evidence shows that persons with asymptomatic, pre-symptomatic (i.e. with no signs and symptoms such as cough, fever etc) or early stages of infection can contribute to the community transmission of COVID-19. A face mask will help reduce the spread of infection in the community by minimizing the shedding of respiratory droplets from infected persons who may not even know they are infected and before they become symptomatic.

Malawi is now experiencing widespread community transmission in this second wave of COVID-19 (so people are being infected in their community doing routine activities – like shopping, traveling on public transport etc.). All districts in Malawi currently have confirmed COVID-19 cases (i.e. those who have been tested and found positive) and the majority (90%) of confirmed cases have no symptoms but are potentially infective to others.

Additionally, it is possible that others are infected and do not have symptoms and have not been tested. These individuals pose a huge risk as they are likely to continue to conduct their normal activities whilst unknowingly infecting others. An Expert group of Malawian Specialists from various fields in Health reviewed both local and global evidence in early June and proposed the following:



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1. Medical face masks and respirators must strictly be for health workers and COVID-19 infected individuals and their caregivers in the community.
2. With current wide-spread transmission the use of quality-assured cloth face masks among members of the general public must be in all circumstances where physical distancing is impractical.
3. To enhance adherence in the use of face-masks, City and district councils should enact appropriate bye-laws requiring mandatory use of cloth masks in areas mentioned above where physical distancing is not possible.

UPDATED RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cloth Masks

- Ministry of Health **recommends universal wearing of non-medical masks** (cloth masks) by the public in settings.
- Community-wide use of masks should be accompanied by risk communications and community messaging, with instructions for correct use and critically not at the expense of other important messages about hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and other evidence informed measures.
- Non-medical masks (cloth masks) are **NOT** recommended for use by persons providing home care for COVID-19 patients.

2. Medical Masks and Respirators

- Ministry of Health will prioritize the use of medical masks and respirators for healthcare workers and caregivers of patient(s) with COVID-19 in household settings.

3. General recommendations

- Masks should be used in addition (and not in preference) to other infection control and prevention (IPC) measures: hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, environmental cleaning and physical distancing measures.
- Face masks should **NOT** be worn by babies and children under 2 years, or by disabled people who are not able to remove the mask themselves.
- School going children aged 6-11 years should wear cloth masks with smaller dimension so that they fit properly
- Those aged 12 years and above should wear adult sizes of the cloth masks



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Types of face masks and recommended use

| Medical Mask | N95 | Cloth Mask |
|--|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| Reserved for health care workers and those providing care to COVID-19 patients at home | Reserved for healthcare worker during certain aerosol-generating procedures only. | For use by the public in situations where social distancing is not possible. |

QUALITY STANDARDS TO BE ADHERED TO FOR CLOTH MASK PRODUCTION

Public/community use of cloth masks **MUST** meet the 5 features for Quality Assurance listed below:

1. Numbers of layers of fabric – Minimum of 3 layers
 - Inner layer - material that retains fluid droplets (hydrophilic) e.g. cotton or cotton blends
 - Middle layer - material that retains fluid droplets (hydrophilic) e.g. synthetic non-woven material such as polypropylene or a cotton layer which may enhance filtration or retain droplets
 - Outer layer - material that repels fluid droplets (hydrophobic) e.g. synthetic material like polypropylene, polyester, or their blends which may limit external contamination from penetration through to the wearer’s nose and mouth.
2. Breathable material – should not markedly increase the work of breathing
3. Shape of mask - flat-fold or duckbill design and must be designed to fit closely over the nose, cheeks and chin of the wearer fully.
4. Fitting of mask- mask can be held in place using elastic bands or ties and should be comfortable to wear without the need for touching or readjustment once in place.
5. Dimensions after sewing the cloth mask **180mm by 160 mm (Maximum) for an adult** however smaller **dimensions (160mm by 140 mm) may be used for children over the age of 5.**



MALAWI GOVERNMENT
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

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HOW TO PUT ON AND TAKE OFF A FACE MASK

Appropriate use and maintenance of cloth face masks is essential to reduce the risk of transmission

- Check if the mask is clean, undamaged and dry before use.
- Clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water before putting on a face mask
- Place the mask on, ensuring it fully covers the mouth and nose, and tie securely/place elastic ear loops to minimize any gaps.
- Avoid touching the front of the mask while wearing it, if you do, clean hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or wash hands with soap and water.
- Remove the mask by untying from behind or taking off the elastic ear loops.
- **Do not touch the front of the mask.**
- After removal or whenever a used mask is inadvertently touched, clean hands using an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Change masks when they become damp with a new clean, dry mask.
- Cloth masks should be washed thoroughly with hot water and detergent after use & then either use a hot iron or drying in the sun.
- When the cloth mask becomes unusable (torn, material is weak etc), dispose it in a pit latrine or burn it

In order to slow the spread on COVID19 in Malawi, masks must be worn correctly and consistently along with other preventive measures such as keeping at least 1-2 metre away from people and frequent hand washing with water and soap.

Your cooperation will be highly appreciated,

Dr Charles Mwansambo
Secretary of Health



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HOW TO WEAR A NON-MEDICAL FABRIC MASK SAFELY

who.int/epi-win

Do's →



Adjust the mask to your face without leaving gaps on the sides



Cover your mouth, nose, and chin



Avoid touching the mask



Clean your hands before touching the mask



Inspect the mask for damage or if dirty



Clean your hands before removing the mask



Remove the mask by the straps behind the ears or head



Pull the mask away from your face



Store the mask in a clean plastic, resealable bag if it is not dirty or wet and you plan to re-use it



Remove the mask by the straps when taking it out of the bag



Wash the mask in soap or detergent, preferably with hot water, at least once a day



Clean your hands after removing the mask

Don'ts →



Do not wear the mask under the nose



Do not remove the mask where there are people within 1 metre



Do not use a mask that is difficult to breathe through



Do not use a mask that looks damaged



Do not wear a loose mask



Do not wear a dirty or wet mask



Do not share your mask with others

A fabric mask can protect others around you. To protect yourself and prevent the spread of COVID-19, remember to keep at least 1 metre distance from others, clean your hands frequently and thoroughly, and avoid touching your face and mask.



World Health Organization

Frequently Asked Questions on Face Masks

Why should I wear a face mask?

There is increasing evidence that persons with asymptomatic, pre-symptomatic or early stages of infection can contribute to the community transmission of COVID-19. A face mask will help reduce the spread of infection in the community by minimizing the shedding of respiratory droplets from infected persons who may not even know they are infected and before they become symptomatic. Ministry of Health recommends that people wear a cloth mask to cover their nose and mouth in the community setting. This is to protect people around you if you are infected but do not have symptoms.



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When do I need to wear a face mask?

A cloth face mask should be worn whenever people are in a community setting, especially in situations where you may be near a group of people where physical distancing is not possible especially this time as we are experiencing widespread community transmission. These settings include grocery stores, markets, banks, public transport, funerals etc. Face masks are not a substitute for physical distancing. Cloth face masks are especially important to wear in public in areas of widespread COVID-19 illness.

Do I still need to stand at least 1m from people if I wear a mask?

Yes. Wearing cloth face mask is an additional public health measure people should take to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The public is advised to continue to practice other measures such as standing at least 1-2 metre apart (Physical distancing), avoiding hand shaking, frequent hand washing and other everyday preventive actions. A cloth face mask is not intended to protect the wearer, but it may prevent the spread of virus from the wearer to others. This would be especially important if someone is infected but does not have symptoms.

What type of face mask should be worn?

The Ministry of Health is recommending that people who have not been diagnosed with COVID19 must use a Cloth face mask when in public or at times when social distancing is not possible. The mask can be made from household items or made at home from common materials like cotton, chitenje etc. at low cost.

Who should not wear cloth face masks?

- Cloth face masks should not be placed on young children younger than 2 years of age, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.
- Health workers or guardians taking care of patients with confirmed COVID19 should not use cloth masks (they should ideally use medical masks or N95)
- Patients with confirmed COVID diagnosis should not wear cloth face masks (they should ideally use medical masks)

Why is MOH recommending cloth face masks and not medical masks for the public?

Surgical masks and N95 respirators are in short supply globally and should be reserved for healthcare workers and for those managing patients with COVID. However, studies have shown that widespread and consistent wearing of cloth masks by the public may help slow the spread of COVID by reducing the potential for those who are asymptomatic but are infected from passing the illness to others.

Can I reuse my cloth mask?

Yes, it is possible to reuse a cloth mask – but you must wash it with water and soap and let it dry in between uses. Ideally have at least 2 or more cloth masks so that you can use one while the other is being cleaned.

How long can I wear a cloth mask for?

You can wear a cloth mask for an extended period of time – up to 6 hours. However, if it becomes wet and damp it is advisable to change your mask for a dry, clean mask.



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Is it ok to share face masks?

It is not advisable to share masks especially if someone has just worn it without it being washed and dried first. Sharing or exchanging of face masks may promote transmission of viral particles on the mask from one person to the other. Ideally everyone should have their own mask.

What type of mask should I wear if I am taking care of a patient with COVID-19?

Guardians and those living with a patient with confirmed COVID-19 should wear a medical mask and **NOT** a cloth mask.

What type of mask should a person with Confirmed COVID-19 wear?

Patients or those suspected to have COVID-19 should wear a medical mask and **NOT** a cloth mask.

Is it ok to wear my mask inside out if it becomes dirty on the outer layer?

No, do not reverse your mask, simply take off the mask and use another mask. Wearing of the mask inside out may increase chances of infection if viral particles landed on the outer part of the mask.

ACCEPTABLE SHAPES OF CLOTH MASKS

DIMENSIONS IN INCHES



ONE SIZE FITS MOST

