

Face coverings, medical masks and disposable gloves

Last updated: 29th September 2020

By law, you have to wear a face covering:

- on public transport
- in shops, shopping centres and some other indoor settings - [see the full list of places](#)

You should also wear a face covering:

- when staying 2 metres apart from people is difficult
- in a healthcare setting - this includes hospitals, GP surgeries, care settings, nursing homes and dental practices
- when visiting anyone who is more at risk from COVID-19 (coronavirus) - such as people aged 70 or over or people who are medically vulnerable

Some people should not or do not have to wear face coverings. [Read about who should not wear one.](#)

There are different levels of restrictions in place in some counties. [Visit gov.ie for more information about levels of restrictions](#) across Ireland.

Face coverings

A face covering is a material you wear that covers the nose and mouth.

Wearing a face covering reduces the spread of COVID-19 in the community. It helps to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets from people infected with COVID-19. This helps to stop people who do not know they have the virus from spreading it to others.

If you have COVID-19 or have symptoms of COVID-19, you must [self-isolate](#). Do this even if you wear a face covering.

If you wear a face covering, you should still do the important things necessary to prevent the spread of the virus.

These include:

- [social distancing](#)
- covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- washing your hands properly and often
- not touching your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

[Read our advice on how to protect yourself and others.](#)

Who should not wear one

You do not have to wear a face covering if you have an illness or impairment that would make wearing or removing a face covering upsetting or uncomfortable.

Face coverings are also not recommended for anyone who:

- has trouble breathing
- is unconscious or incapacitated
- is unable to remove it without help
- has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering

Face coverings are not recommended for children under the age of 13, but some children may choose to wear one. This is because young children may not follow the advice about wearing a face covering correctly. They also may not understand the importance of not touching it.

But children under 13 should wear a face covering if their doctor or healthcare worker advises this. For example, some children may be advised to do this when attending a hospital clinic.

Children who may be under 13 in their first year of secondary school should wear a face covering when attending school. This is because they are at the same developmental stage as their peers and can follow the advice on using face coverings properly.

When to wear one

By law, you have to wear a face covering on public transport, and in:

- shops, including pharmacies
- shopping centres
- libraries
- cinemas and cinema complexes
- theatres
- concert halls
- bingo halls
- museums
- nail salons
- hair salons and barbers
- tattoo and piercing parlours
- travel agents and tour operators
- laundries and dry cleaners
- bookmakers

When you can remove your face covering

You can remove your face covering if you need to:

- talk to someone who has difficulties communicating
- provide emergency help or care to a vulnerable person

- take medication

You may be asked to remove your face covering to verify your age or identity.

You may also remove your face covering when you are:

- at a post office, credit union or bank
- eating and drinking at a restaurant or café - wear one until you get to your table and when you are leaving
- getting medical or dental treatment

What they are made from

Face coverings are made from cloth materials such as cotton or silk.

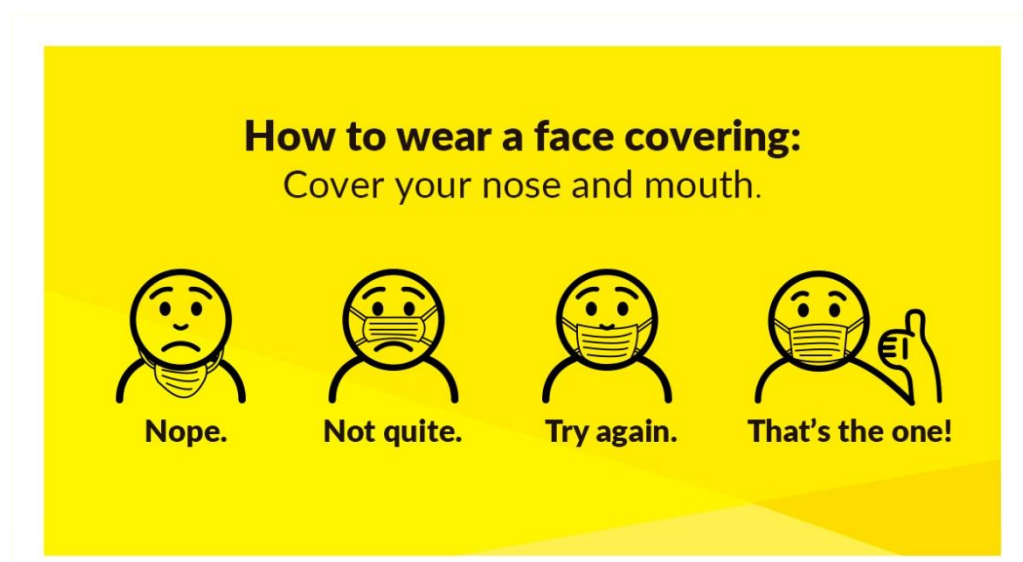
You can buy them or make them at home using items such as scarfs, t-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels.

Other types of face coverings include [visors or face shields](#). These are usually made from plastic.

How to wear one

A cloth face covering should cover the nose and go under the chin and:

- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- be secured with ties or ear loops
- include at least 2 layers of fabric
- allow for breathing without restriction



Glasses fogging up

If you wear glasses and a face covering, your glasses may fog up. The warm air from your breath can escape from the top of your face covering. This can cause the lenses of your glasses to fog up making it difficult to see.

Cleaning your glasses makes them less likely to fog up.

Before putting on a face covering:

1. Wash your glasses with soapy water.
2. Shake off the extra moisture.
3. Let your glasses air dry or gently dry the lenses with a clean cloth.

Make sure your face covering fits well

A well-fitting face covering can stop your glasses fogging up. It should not be uncomfortable but should fit tightly enough to not leave any gaps around your nose.

Place your glasses on top of the seal of the face covering to try to stop your breath reaching up to your glasses.

You may not be able to position your face covering up high enough for this. If you can't, try sealing the face covering to your face at the gap under your glasses. You can use a small piece of surgical tape.

How to wash one

You should wash and reuse cloth face coverings to reduce waste.

You do not need to sterilise face coverings. Wash it in a washing machine or by hand as you would any other item of clothing.

You can include your mask with your regular laundry.

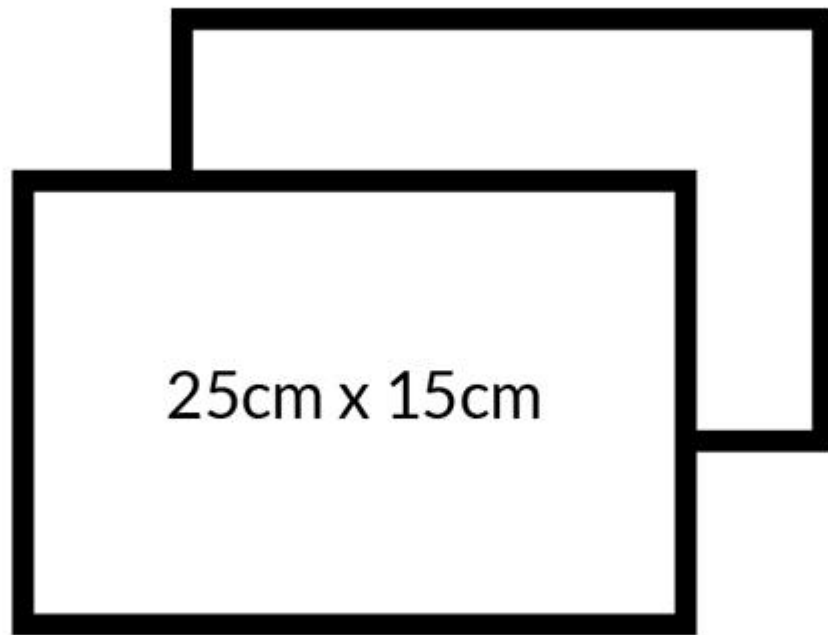
Use regular laundry detergent. Wash the mask and the warmest appropriate setting for the cloth used to make the mask.

If using a washing machine, you should be able to wash and machine dry it without damage or change to shape.

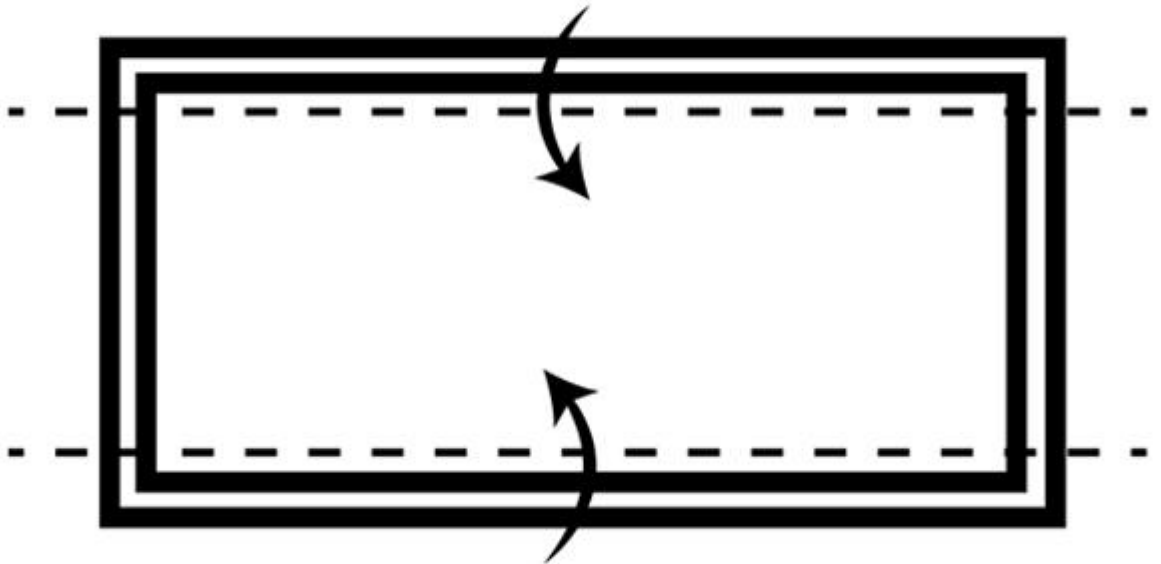
How to make a cloth face covering

To make a cloth face covering at home:

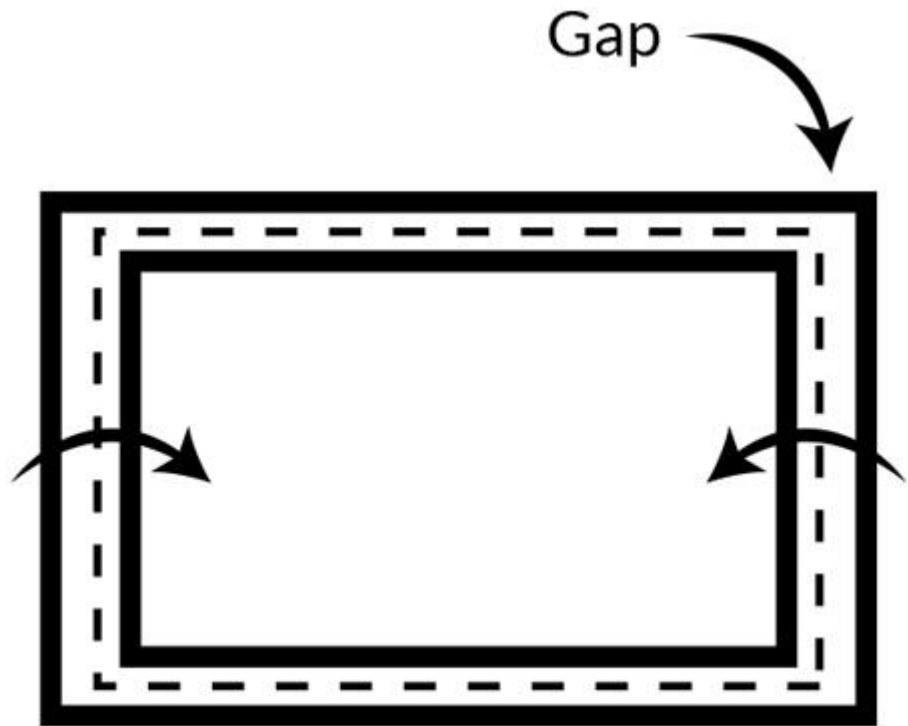
1. Cut two rectangles of tightly-woven cotton about 25cm x 15cm.



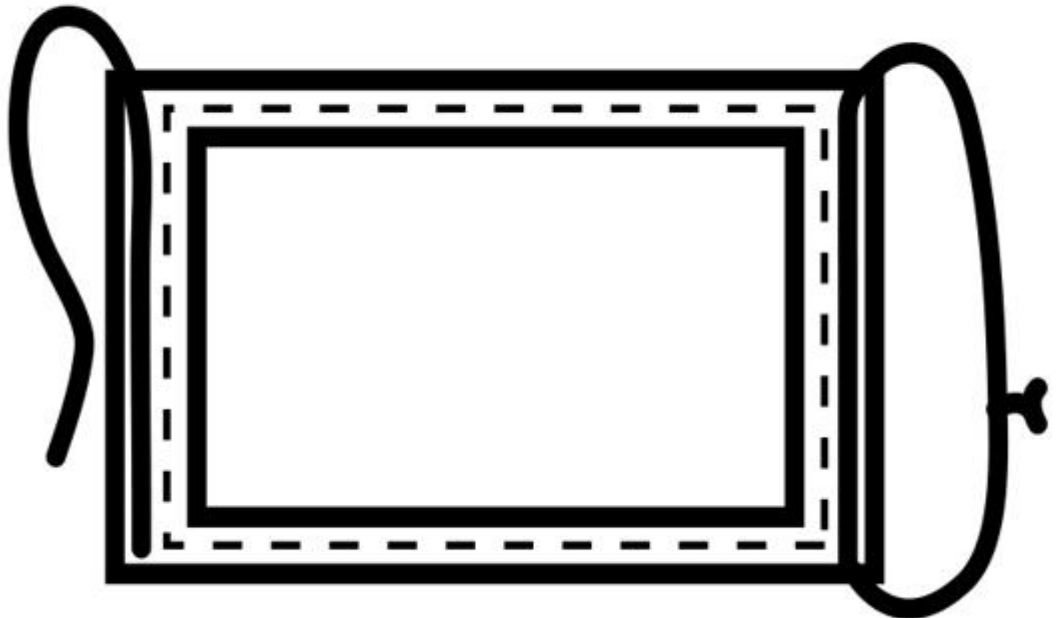
2. Fold and stitch the top and bottom edges.



3. Fold and stitch the side edges, leaving a gap big enough to thread elastic through.



4. Thread two 15cm lengths of elastic through the side edges and tie tight. Hair ties or string, cut longer and tied behind the head, will work.



5. Tuck elastic knots inside the edges of the mask and stitch in place for a neater finish.



When to throw it out

You should throw out a face covering when it:

- no longer covers the nose and mouth
- has stretched out or damaged ties or straps
- cannot stay on the face
- has holes or tears in the fabric

How to use a face covering properly

Do

Clean your hands properly before you put it on.

Practice using it so you are comfortable putting it on and taking it off.

Make sure it is made from a fabric you are comfortable wearing.

Cover your mouth and nose with it and make sure there are no gaps between your face covering.

Tie it securely.

Carry unused face coverings in a sealable clean waterproof bag, for example, a ziplock.

Carry a second similar type bag to put used face coverings in.

Don't

Do not touch a face covering while wearing it - if you do, clean your hands properly.

Do not use a wet or soiled face covering.

Do not share face coverings.

Do not lower your face coverings to speak, eat and [smoke](#) or vape - if you need to uncover your nose or mouth take the face covering off and put it in a bag for used face coverings.

Do not discard face coverings in public places.

Taking a reusable face covering off

To take a face covering off properly:

- remove it from behind - do not touch the front of the mask
- put in a sealable clean waterproof bag or wash immediately
- clean your hands properly

Disposable masks

To safely dispose of a single-use mask:

- remove it from behind - do not touch the front of the mask
- throw it away immediately into a closed bin
- wash your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- dispose of it in your general 'black bag' waste bin at home or work, or a litter bin if you're outside
- do not put them in a recycling bin as they cannot be recycled
- take them home with you if there is no litter bin - do not drop them as litter

Visors and face shields

[If you find it difficult to wear a cloth face covering](#), it's okay to wear a full face visor or face shield instead. They are not as good as wearing a face covering, but you'll still get some level of protection.

The visor should wrap around the sides of your face (ear to ear) and extend to below the chin. Reusable visors should be cleaned after each use and then stored in a clean place until needed.

You should still wear a mask if you:

- have COVID-19, think you have coronavirus or are waiting on a test result
- are caring for someone with COVID-19 or who has suspected COVID-19
- are [self-isolating](#) and you cannot keep 2 metres between you and other people in your household

Medical face masks

Medical face masks are for:

- healthcare workers
- people in [self-isolation](#) who cannot keep a distance of 2 metres between themselves and other people in their household

Some workers in specific jobs also use them. Medical masks are vital supplies. They are not intended for use by the general public unless you are in [self-isolation and cannot keep a distance of 2 metres between you and other people in your household](#).

Wear a cloth face covering when shopping and on public transport. This will help to make sure that medical face masks are kept for those who really need them.

Disposable gloves

Do not wear disposable gloves instead of washing your hands. The virus gets on them in the same way it gets on your hands. Also, your hands can get contaminated when you take them off.

Disposable gloves are worn in medical settings. They are not as effective in daily life.

Wearing disposable gloves can give you a false sense of security.

You might:

- sneeze or cough into the gloves - this creates a new surface for the virus to live on
- contaminate yourself when taking off the gloves or touching surfaces
- not wash your hands as often as you need to and touch your face with contaminated gloves

[How to properly wash your hands and avoid infection](#)