

# Masks

Between 2013 and 2021, the proportion of immunocompromised adults in the US **rose significantly from 3% to nearly 7%**, underscoring the rapid growth of this vulnerable population and the pressing need to address their unique health challenges. Masks play a critical role in protecting people who are immunocompromised by reducing their exposure to germs, lowering their risk of infection and severe illness, and enabling them to participate more safely in public settings.



The COVID-19 pandemic showed us that masks protect people from respiratory illnesses. Immunocompromised individuals should have the freedom to make personal decisions about masking to protect their health, and all choices should be free of political pressure or intimidation.

## How masks work



**Masks act as a barrier**, limiting exposure to germs – their effectiveness varies depending on the germ.



When worn by people who are sick, **masks help reduce the chances of spreading germs** to others.



**Masks can also protect people who are immunocompromised** from inhaling germs.

## Different types of masks



Different masks block germs better or worse depending on their design and how well they fit against your face.



**These options are helpful, starting with the most effective:** NIOSH-approved filtering facepiece respirators (N95), international filtering facepiece respirators (KN95), surgical/disposable masks, cloth masks.

## Masks and COVID-19

States with at least 75% mask adherence had an average COVID-19 rate of 109.26 cases per 100,000 individuals, compared to 249.99 per 100,000 for states with lower mask adherence, suggesting that **high mask adherence may significantly reduce COVID-19 spread.**

## Steps YOU can take

- ✓ If you are sick, consider wearing a mask in public spaces.
- ✓ When wearing a mask, choose the most protective type based on fit.
- ✓ A well-fitting mask allows air to pass through the front, and you may notice the mask material moving in and out with each breath.
- ✓ Organizations can help reduce the likelihood of illness spread by providing access to high-quality masks.

## Key times for prevention

- ✓ When respiratory illnesses spread rapidly in your community, masks can help you avoid catching the disease.
- ✓ When you or the people around you were recently exposed to a respiratory illness or are sick.
- ✓ When you or the people around you have **risk factors for severe illness.**