

COVID-19 GUIDELINES ON FABRIC FACE MASKS

15 April , 2020

The use of 'fabric' face masks as an additional preventative measure against COVID-19 has been recommended for public use by the National Department of Health (NDoH). The spread of COVID-19 is mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. Therefore, wearing a fabric face mask is added as a prevention measure to help limit community transmission of the virus.

The NDoH has compiled a document on recommended guidelines for the use of fabric face masks in the community that aims to address questions around how to make and effectively use fabric face masks aimed at the general public. Amongst others, addressed in this guideline is:

- The basic performance requirements;
- The fabric selection impacting, comfort, disposal, and disinfection amongst others;
- The design for optimal functionality and safety; and
- Instruction guidelines for using fabric face masks.

Moreover, it is important to follow the recommended guidelines and basic rules of usage such as the below:

- Face masks should never be touched when wearing them – fidgeting with the mask repeatedly is strongly discouraged as it is important to avoid touching your face with hands;
- Do not lower the face mask when speaking, coughing, or sneezing;
- The inner side of the face mask should not be touched with hands;
- Face masks should cover your nose and mouth entirely; and
- Wash fabric face masks with soap and water and iron when dry.

The basic rules for using fabric masks can be accessed on <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/04/10/dr-zweli-mkhize-recommends-the-widespread-use-of-cloth-masks/>

Knowledge about COVID-19 continues to unfold, current knowledge is based largely on what is known about similar coronaviruses. It is important to mention that this interim guideline may be updated as needed and as additional information becomes available.

The guidelines on fabric masks can be accessed on <https://www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidelines-Use-of-cloth-face-masks.pdf>

Take note, wearing a mask is not a primary preventative measure and should not provide a false sense of protection that leads to a misuse of masks. COVID-19 preventative measures include the exercise of good hand hygiene and physical distancing.