

'Masks do make a difference, don't they?'

Many people wonder if home-made masks are protecting from coronaviruses. The formal advice heard is often contradicting and confusing. This is a reflection of the circulating stories.

You are right, facial masks do protect. That's why they use them in hospitals.

However, those are of special quality (so called FFO2 and FFP3) and do catch a great part of those tiny viral monsters. Moreover, those professionals can change them often and put on fresh, sterile ones, wearing gloves!

This does not mean that homemade masks are completely useless. However, careful and safe handling of those devices makes the difference between partial protection and prolonged danger of contaminating oneself. This proves to be difficult. That's why they officially are not encouraged in some places.*)

What is so difficult and risky?

Once you pass through a cloud of viruses you catch them in the damp mask and carry them home.

Arriving at home you must take it off, without touching the front part and soak it immediately in a bucket with a detergent, e.g. washing powder in water.

In case you use a type like an envelope in which you did put a folded piece of nonwoven fabric or paper napkin, you remove the paper first, using gloves if possible! Otherwise, wash your hands immediately. One should do that often anyway.

(These envelope type masks with a nonwoven filter in it seem to protect better, but I did not see any reliable article on that.) Make sure you have several of those masks ready for use because you'll need to change them often.

So it requires attention and discipline to use facial masks successfully!

Taking them off and putting them in your pocket for reusing when meeting people is endangering yourself!

Here some instructions on how to make facial masks at home.

These are based on the creativity and experience of my sister Margriet.

She uses plain white cotton, the fabric of which sheets and pillowcases are made of.

Of course, with colorful cotton, it looks much funnier!

'I folded the cotton and sew a double seam on both sides, creating a tunnel. You can put an elastic ribbon through. At first, I didn't have that so I used some cotton thread and twined it into a cord of approximately one meter.

The upper side is open, so you get an envelope. There I put a piece of double folded nonwoven fabric, acting as a filter. Coffee filter, vacuum bags or even a double folded paper towel can be used as a substitute.

The brim under the chin got an extra seam for better fitting.

After coming home from shopping I remove the paper, wash the mask and dry it for next time.'

Margriet continues: 'The first one I made was too big for myself, but it fitted perfectly on my son's face. So I suggest making several sizes.

Measure the distance between the eyes until under the chin for height and for width the length of the jawbone plus 3 cm on both sides for the tunnel. It will fit perfectly!'

She added a warning: 'Don't use a too old piece of fabric. I did so, and after several times of washing it tore...'

I hope this is useful.

Lots of success and take care!

*)This is the formal FDA opinion:

The FDA does not have specifications for homemade masks, but the masks many in the country are crafting are most like the loose-fitting surgical masks. (These are not the same as the special virus-blocking FTP2 or -3 masks!) The FDA states that when properly worn, surgical masks are "meant to help block large-particle droplets, splashes, sprays or splatter that may contain germs (viruses and bacteria), keeping it from reaching your mouth and nose."

The FDA added, however, that an ordinary surgical mask "by design, does not filter or block very small particles in the air like viruses, that may be transmitted by coughs, sneezes, or certain medical procedures."

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