



HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Does Wearing Two Masks Provide More Protection?

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From VOA Learning English, this is the Health & Lifestyle report.

Throughout the coronavirus health crisis, health officials across the world have been advising people to take important **precautions** to protect themselves.

We have been asked to wash our hands often and correctly. We have also been urged to stay socially distant from people outside our own **household**. And one of the most important precautions, of course, is to wear a face **mask**.

But as the pandemic continues, some people are now asking: Can wearing *two* masks provide more protection against the virus? The quick answer is: it depends.

Some health experts say it is possible that doubling up the masks could help in some situations.

One of those experts is Dr. David Hamer. He is an infectious disease expert at Boston University. Wearing just one mask should be enough for most situations, Hamer told The Associated Press. But the mask needs to fit well, he adds, and not be **loose**.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends wearing a cloth mask made from two or more **layers**. The mask, the health agency adds, needs to cover both the nose and mouth. And it should fit **snugly** on the face.

But even with the best fitting mask, some people might want extra protection in some situations. For example, people who are at risk for severe illness if infected with the coronavirus may want to wear two masks. People also may want to double up if they plan to be around others for long periods of time indoors or must be in an enclosed area, such as on an airplane.

In high-risk situations, another expert suggests wearing a cloth mask as well as a **surgical mask**. Dr. Monica Gandhi is an infectious disease expert at the University of California, San Francisco.

She says wearing both a cloth and surgical mask -- with either mask on top -- could offer increased protection against the coronavirus. Wearing the two masks that way, Gandhi adds, could have a similar effect as wearing an N95 mask.

N95 masks are a kind of personal protection equipment designed for health care workers and medical **first responders**. The [CDC](#) does not suggest that the general public wear N95 masks.

Gandhi also advises the use of added protection for people who will be indoors in areas where infection rates are high.

She offers another suggestion for situations where a person wants to receive the highest level of protection possible: A two-layer cloth mask that has a **filter** material in between.

For people wearing single cloth masks for everyday use, Gandhi has one important piece of advice -- make sure the cloth is made from strongly **woven** material. She says the mask should also have at least two layers. The layers and tight weave make it harder for virus-carrying particles to pass through the material.

And that's the Health & Lifestyle report. I'm Anna Matteo.

Reporters at the Associated Press wrote this story. Anna Matteo adapted it for VOA Learning English. Bryan Lynn was the editor.

Words in This Story

precaution – *n.* a measure taken beforehand to prevent harm or secure good

household – *n.* the people in a family or other group that are living together in one house

mask – *n.* a covering used to hide or disguise your face

loose – *adj. of clothing:* not fitting close to your body : not tight

layer – *n.* a covering piece of material or a part that lies over or under another

snugly – *adv.* fitting closely and comfortably

surgical mask – *n.* a rectangular-shaped face mask (as of fabric or polypropylene fiber) that is typically secured by two straps tied in the back of head and is intended to be worn by medical personnel during surgical procedures especially to protect the wearer against splashes or splatters of blood or body fluid and to prevent contamination of the patient's surgical wounds

first responder – *n.* a person (such as a police officer or an EMT) who is among those responsible for going immediately to the scene of an accident or emergency to provide assistance

filter – *n.* a device that is used to remove something unwanted from a liquid or gas that passes through it

woven – *adj.* to form (as cloth) by lacing together strands of material