



## Update on Masking and Double Masking






Updated January 28, 2021

This guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health and is posted at [www.sfgdcp.org/ppe](http://www.sfgdcp.org/ppe).

### Should I "double-mask" (i.e., wear one mask on top of another)?

By far the most important aspect of masking is that you wear it properly (covering mouth and nose) and consistently whenever you are outside your home and around others you don't live with. It is important to keep your mask on when talking, working hard, and even while eating except when you're putting food into your mouth or taking a drink.

Mask quality is also important. Choose a mask that has two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric that fits snugly against the side of your face and doesn't have gaps. You can also wear a pleated disposable mask, sometimes called a "surgical", "isolation", or "medical" mask as long as you adjust these masks so they conform to your nose, have been expanded to include your chin, and fit snugly against the sides of your faces.

DO choose masks that	DO NOT choose Masks that
 <p>Have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric</p>	 <p>Are made of fabric that makes it hard to breathe, for example, vinyl</p>
 <p>Completely cover your nose and mouth</p>	 <p>Have exhalation valves or vents which allow virus particles to escape</p>
 <p>Fit snugly against the sides of your face and don't have gaps</p>	

\*If wearing a gaiter, make sure it has two layers or fold it to make two layers. Bandanas generally do not provide a snug fit around your face and are not recommended.

Double masking may not be better than single masking especially if you have a very high quality, effective single mask or N95 respirator. Wearing a mask under an N95 respirator will decrease the N95's effectiveness and should be avoided. Masks are sometimes worn over an N95 respirator to extend the N95's life and this practice does not decrease the N95's effectiveness.

Outside the context of N-95 respirators, wearing a second mask may offer better protection to the wearer and those around them if the second, outer mask improves the fit of the first mask by making it fit snugly around your face better without gaps. Using two masks made from different materials may also provide improved protection because one mask may capture particles the other doesn't and vice versa (this is sometimes referred to as the "Swiss Cheese Model of Protection" because of the way slices of swiss cheese can be stacked to block off holes).

However, double masking may make mask use more uncomfortable, including making it harder to breathe. The most important factor is that you **consistently wear a mask that covers your mouth and nose**. If a mask becomes uncomfortable and leads you to take it off periodically, it cannot protect you or those around you and **is much more harmful than wearing a single mask consistently**.

If you can comfortably and **consistently** wear double masks that are snugly fit around your face with no gaps, you may choose to do so especially in higher risk situations (e.g., indoors, situations where masks are being removed or are not consistently on, crowded settings, etc.). The San Francisco Department of Public Health, like the CDC, will continue to review the science and data to determine if there are specific circumstances or specific materials that would make double-masking clearly more superior to single-masking with a double layered, snugly fit single mask; currently no such clear data exists.