

Guide to Mask Use in Health Care Settings*

August 2021

Purpose

To provide information about mask types and appropriate mask use.

General guidance

A risk assessment should be undertaken to determine whether a mask and what type is required.

Masks used for infection prevention and control requirements¹

Particulate respirators are also known as 'air-purifying respirators' because they protect by filtering particles out of the air as you breathe.² To be effective, a tight facial seal covering the nose, mouth and chin is required.

Medical masks are defined as surgical or procedure masks that are flat or pleated. They are affixed to the head with straps that go around the ears, or head, or both. Their performance characteristics are tested to a set of standardised test methods.³ The New Zealand Standard complies with the British and European Standard. The mask should fit securely over the nose, mouth and chin with no gaps at the side.

¹ Ministry of Health – the role of medical masks and particulate respirators in health and disability care settings. Other PPE may be required.

² Particulate respirators are required to meet Australian and New Zealand Standards: AS/NZS 1716:2012 or equivalent.

³ Medical masks are required to meet the New Zealand Standard (British Standard (BS) and European Standard (EN) 14683:2019 (Type I, II and IIR) or an equivalent Standard such as the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM) Standard F2100-11 (2011) (Level 1, 2 and 3).

Type used	By whom	Purpose	Examples
Particulate respirators P2 or N95	Health care worker	Protects the wearer	When providing care for patients known or suspected to be infected with pathogens transmitted by the airborne route – airborne precautions. When present during an aerosol generating procedure performed on a patient with a suspected or confirmed acute respiratory tract infection – airborne precautions.
Medical masks with splash resistance <i>Moderate to high splash resistance</i> Level 3 Type IIR <i>Moderate splash resistance</i> Level 2 <i>Low splash resistance</i> Level 1	Health care worker	Protects the wearer Protects the wearer (Level 2, 3 or Type IIR) Protects the wearer (Level 1) Protects the patient	When providing care for patients with an acute respiratory tract infection and where the risk assessment requires adherence to droplet precautions. Surgical procedures or major trauma and procedures where there is a moderate to high risk of exposure to blood and body fluid splash – standard precautions. Procedures where there is a low risk of blood and body fluid splash – standard precautions. During a surgical or medical procedure, the mask prevents the passage of microbes from the nose and mouth of the health care worker into the surgical wound and sterile field.
Medical masks without splash resistance Type II Type I	Health care worker Patient Visitors/ health care/ non-health worker	Protects the patient Protects others Protects others	During a medical procedure, the mask prevents the passage of microbes from the nose and mouth of the health care worker into the sterile field. To be worn by patients with respiratory symptoms to reduce dispersal of infectious respiratory particles – source control. May be worn for source control when a mask is not a requirement for standard or transmission-based precautions.

* For mask use at the Border, in Managed Isolation or Quarantine Facilities refer to the setting specific IPC policies and procedures.



August 2021
HP 7803