



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



Do I need a mask?

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How does flu spread?

In the current situation, the influenza A/H1N1 flu virus appears to be spreading from person to person mainly by infected people coughing and sneezing. The virus spreads when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people within approximately one metre. It settles on surfaces in the surrounding environment. Flu viruses may then spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands.

How can I prevent myself catching influenza?

- **Wash your hands often with soap and water, and especially after coughing and sneezing and before eating. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.**
- **There is no indication for using masks except when [caring for somebody who may have flu](#)**
- **Avoid unnecessary close contact with people who have influenza**
- **Make sure children and others follow this advice.**

What is a facemask?

A face mask is a protective covering that covers the nose and mouth. It is worn to protect another person's nose and mouth from other people's cough and sneezes and helps to reduce the wearer coughing on others.

Should the general public wear masks?

No. The wearing of masks by healthy individuals (i.e. the general public) who are not involved in caring for people who are ill is not recommended. Some people may choose to do so.

The available scientific evidence does not suggest that this is an effective preventive measure when used in this way

When should masks be used?

Facemasks may need to be used in the home of a person with suspected or confirmed influenza.

- The sick person should wear a mask to reduce the risk of passing on the infection to others while in a common area of the house
- Caregivers should wear a mask while in the same room as the sick person to reduce the risk of getting an infection

Further information on caring for people at home with suspected or confirmed influenza is available [here](#).

Masks should be considered as the last line of defence against influenza viruses and are NEVER a substitute for

1. [Hand hygiene](#)
2. [Respiratory hygiene](#)

You need to stay at home if you have symptoms of flu.