

How to pick a face mask for OMICRON VARIANT



We know that masks are one of the best ways to protect ourselves against the COVID-19 virus. With the arrival of the Omicron variant, scientists have found that not all masks have equal efficacy against it. Omicron variant is highly virulent, we should re-evaluate safety standards with respect to the right mask to be worn in public spaces.



Is a cloth mask effective to protect against the Omicron variant?

A cloth mask is better than being without a mask, but the efficacy is generally not equivalent to a three-ply surgical mask, KN95, or N95 respirator in protecting oneself against any variants.



If we only have a cloth mask, should we double up?

If you are wearing a single layer cloth mask, it is advisable to double it up. Also strongly advised to wash cloth mask daily. You can wash it in hot water with soap and hang to dry.



Are surgical masks available at grocery and medical stores effective against Omicron? Should they be doubled up?

The three-ply surgical masks do offer protection, but there is no evidence that doubling up will help.



What about N95 and KN95 masks? Do these masks offer better protection against Omicron?

N95 and KN95 masks are the better of the lot, for all variants of COVID-19, if worn and fitted well. They are often a bit more tight-fitting than a surgical mask, and the material filters out more particles, so the air that goes through the material and not around the mask is filtered better.

Certified N95 masks are considered the gold standard face coverings for blocking viral particles.

Time taken to transmit an infectious dose of COVID-19

		Person not infected is wearing			
		Nothing	Cloth mask	Surgical mask	N 95
Person infected is wearing	Nothing	15 min.	20 min.	30 min.	2.5 hours
	Cloth mask	20 min.	27 min.	40 min.	3.3 hours
	Surgical mask	30 min.	40 min.	1 hour	5 hours
	N 95	2.5 hours	3.3 hours	5 hours	25 hours

Source: ACGIH's Pandemic response task force

Not everyone has access to an N95 mask that fits properly and can be worn every day. So, what's the next best thing?

While three-ply surgical masks are better filters of virus particles, it was also observed that cloth masks can be comparable to surgical masks that people wear—filtering around 50% to 75% of particles. Cloth masks are variable in terms of fit, stitch, and material and are not standardised.

References:

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