Masks, Gloves, & COVID-19: Who should wear what and why

As of April 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, some countries are telling their citizens to wear masks, others are recommending against it. Recommendations strongly depend on whether or not the virus has become communal (spread largely without known contact with a person positive for the virus). Countries asking citizens to wear cloth masks is a response to those positive for the virus and who are exhibiting no symptoms (carriers). Masks that are not medical grade (N95), such as cloth masks, are not intended to protect a person from COVID-19, but rather aim to protect others from those who may unknowingly be positive for the virus. All masks have the potential to be dangerous if not worn or cared for properly.

Gloves are being worn by some, not by others, but there are both benefits and issues that can be associated with their use. What do we need to know to stay safe?

Information in this document is based on episodes from AiArthritis Voices 360: Special COVID-19 & AiArthritis Series, the official talk show produced by the International Foundation for Autoimmune & Autoinflammatory Arthritis (AiArthritis). The complete episodes can be heard on our website or you can subscribe to the show anywhere you listen to podcasts.
Masks, Gloves, & COVID-19

The information provided in this document is based on the information presented in the International Foundation for AiArthritis talk show (AiArthritis Voices 360) Special COVID-19 & AiArthritis series. Our lead co-host, Danielle, is also a volunteer with our foundation and based the discussion on research and resources collected from government publications, research studies, and expert testimony (See Resources). She was joined by guest co-host, Kristen, St. Louis, Missouri Spondylitis Association of America support group leader and practicing nurse. Both hosts are persons living with AiArthritis diseases.

Disclaimer: Neither the International Foundation for AiArthritis nor the Spondylitis Association of America will be issuing an official recommendation on whether or not patients should wear masks. The episode provides reliable information that listeners can use to make their own decision regarding their own personal safety.

While in some circumstances wearing gloves and masks could potentially help protect you from COVID-19, several factors must be considered to ensure your safety. Some masks offer very little protection from the virus, and are intended to be worn mostly to protect others from you (because it is thought that up to 25% of the people who are spreading the COVID-19 virus are asymptomatic). Even if you have an N95 mask (for example, you painted your attic last year), if not worn correctly - or if proper use and disposal procedures are not followed - these would not protect you from contracting COVID-19.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has started to recommend that members of the American public wear cloth masks when outside of their homes, while other countries require their use and still others do not recommend use at this time (mostly locations with minimal outbreak). At this time, while wearing gloves is not required, many people are using them to protect themselves from COVID-19. But these too can be dangerous. What do you need to know to stay safe?

Danielle and Kristen discuss these issues in two episodes:

- **COVID-19 & Masks: Who should wear what and why.** This “full episode” is about 50 minutes and covers information for medical professionals and the public. [It can be found on our website](#) or you can subscribe anywhere you listen to podcasts.
- **COVID-19 & Gloves: Handy precautions to keep you safe.** This mini episode is about 10 minutes and covers proper glove usage, disposal, and precautions. [It can be found on our website](#) or you can subscribe anywhere you listen to podcasts.
Key questions these episodes answer:

- “What type of mask should I be wearing?”
- “If I wear a mask, will I be protected from getting COVID-19? What additional safety measures should I take?”
- “I have heard some people say that wearing a mask is dangerous. So why is my country making me wear one? What do I need to know to stay safe?”
- “I’ve been told, don’t worry, our grocery store workers or food delivery staff are wearing gloves. But some reputable sites - like the World Health Organization (WHO) - say washing hands is safer than wearing gloves. So how does wearing gloves protect me from COVID-19?”
- “How do I properly remove gloves so I do not contaminate myself with any virus particle that could be on them?”

Best practice for wearing a mask: Start episode at 19:58 or simply listen to the episode in its' entirety

Wearing a mask and using it improperly may put the wearer at more risk of contracting COVID-19 than not wearing it at all. Also note, cloth masks are not intended to protect you from the virus; they are intended to prevent you from spreading the virus to others if you are a silent carrier. Mask precautions:

- Never touch your face while wearing a mask
- Tie back hair so that you are not tempted to brush it out of your face
- Use medical tape to seal edges on the bridge of the nose and along the sides of the nose (top of mask)
- When putting on your mask, hold it by the straps or loops as far as possible from the piece that covers your face
- Position the mask along the bridge of the nose first, position it under your chin, and then fasten the attachments
- Do not touch the square portion of the mask that covers your face
- DO NOT remove your mask temporarily by allowing it to drape around your neck, or place it in your bag or purse as the masks may be covered with viral particles and can transfer to other surfaces
- To remove the mask, reverse the procedure and avoid touching the square portion of the mask
- Wash hands before and after putting on or removing a mask
If you are wearing a cloth mask, wash your mask immediately after EVERY use to avoid spreading any virus that has collected on the material.

If you take your mask off with bare hands, touching the front of the mask and then failing to immediately wash your hands, you can contaminate your hands and other surfaces.

Individuals must continue to take all previous precautions (social distancing, hand washing, etc) even when wearing a mask.

If you are going to wear a mask, you still need to clean all the surface areas around you because the mask does not provide 100% protection from the virus. Frequent hand washing is still the best way to protect yourself from COVID-19.

**Best practice for wearing gloves:** [Listen to the 10 minute mini - sode](#)

- Be careful when wearing gloves and then touching items like your water bottle, cell phone, or computer keyboard.
- Any item you touch while wearing gloves should be cleaned before you handle that item with your bare hands.
- You should still sanitize your hands or wash them routinely after wearing gloves, as you could have come in contact with the virus while wearing them and inadvertently transferred the particles from the outer surface of the gloves to another surface or your hands.
- You should also consider using hand sanitizer directly on the gloves after coming in contact with a surface (metal door knob, keypad on credit card machine, etc.) - just as if you would with your bare skin.
- What you need to remember is gloves protect the skin from direct viral contact. But the virus is still on the gloves if those gloves come in contact with the virus. So if you touch something another person has touched, and the outside of their gloves have come into contact with the virus, the viral particles from their gloves can transfer to other surfaces.
- Make sure to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap after receiving any item from a person wearing gloves before you touch anything else. This includes other surfaces in addition to your face.

While it is important to follow the regulations provided by your country, please remember to practice all recommended prevention precautions (social distancing, hand washing, etc) even when wearing a cloth mask or gloves.
Resources

Information how to wear or create masks:

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** Surgeon General, Dr. Jerome Adams, shares ways to create your own face covering in a few easy steps. [Link]

- **Instructional video for sewing the Olson mask (COVID-19, ) Unity Point Health - Cedar Rapids, Iowa (advanced).** Includes links to download sewing pattern. A new modular mask, The Olson, named after 1930’s legendary maker nurse Lyla Mae Olson, was quickly developed by clinicians from UnityPoint Health and is being shared across the globe in the fight against COVID19. [Link]

- **CBS Sacramento:** [Link to view proper removal of masks and gloves]