The use of face masks in public may reduce the spread of infection in the community by minimizing the release of respiratory droplets from infected people.

A medical face mask (also known as a surgical or procedure mask) creates a barrier between hospital staff and patients by covering the mouth, nose and chin. It is usually worn by healthcare workers to prevent large respiratory droplets and splashes from reaching other healthcare personnel or from the wearer. It also reduces and/or controls the spread of large respiratory droplets from the person wearing it.

Non-medical face masks (or ‘community’ masks) include various types of self-made or commercial masks and face covers made of cloth, other textiles or other materials (e.g. paper). They are not standardised and not intended for use in healthcare settings by healthcare professionals.

A respirator or a filtering face piece is designed to protect the wearer from exposure to airborne contaminants and is classified as personal protective equipment. Filtering face pieces are mainly used by healthcare workers, especially during aerosol-generating procedures. Valved respirators are not appropriate for use as a means of infection control, as they do not prevent the release of respiratory particles from the wearer into the environment.

Remember! Proper use of face masks is key for their effectiveness and safety.

The use of face masks in the community may be considered when visiting busy, closed spaces such as grocery stores, shopping centres, or when using public transport etc. Face masks should only be considered as a complementary measure and not a replacement for established preventive practices, such as physical distancing, cough and sneeze etiquette, hand hygiene and avoiding face touching.

The use of medical face masks by healthcare workers must be given priority over their use in the community.

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