Do Face Masks Really Provide Protection from the Spread of COVID-19?

We are all told to wear face masks now, but if face masks are so good why didn't they tell us to wear them before. The reason is the experts did not realize people could spread the virus before symptoms appeared. They have found some people have COVID-19 without showing any symptoms. That means they can spread the virus to others without knowing it. Thus, wearing a mask, washing your hands often and practicing social distancing does help to slow the virus.

When these discoveries were made the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) started recommending the wearing of face masks. The CDC recommends the public wear cloth face masks and not the surgical or N95 masks worn by health care providers.

A cloth mask should trap any droplets from the nose or mouth that are released when a person talks, coughs or sneezes. When everyone wears a cloth mask it can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 when people do not realize they have it. Cloth masks help reduce the spread when widely used by people in public settings. In fact, countries that required people to wear face masks, practice isolation and social distancing early in the pandemic have slowed the spread of COVID-19.

Cloth masks can be made from tightly woven cotton from sheets or purchased cotton fabric. The CDC https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-make-cloth-face-covering.html and other places have directions on making cloth masks on their websites. Cloth masks should include multiple layers of fabric. No-sew masks can be made from bandannas and T-shirts as shown on the CDC website.

 Best Practices when wearing a face mask:
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before and after applying and removing your mask.
- Put the mask over your mouth and nose and use ear loops or tie it behind your head.
- Make sure it fits snuggly against your face and under your chin.
- When removing the mask, it is best to put it in a plastic bag or container until you can wash it.
- Regularly wash your mask. It can be washed in the washing machine with other clothes.
- It's best to have more than one mask to ensure you have one when you are out.

People who have trouble breathing or unable to remove the mask by themselves without help should not wear a mask. Do not put masks on children under the age of 2.

If you have not worn a mask before, start wearing it at home a little at first and then longer. You will get more comfortable wearing it. Some masks fit better than others or are easier to breathe through. Find one that works for you if you are having problems. Many kinds are available.

Let's help keep others and ourselves safer by wearing a cloth mask, washing our hands often and practicing social distancing.

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