

N95 Respirators vs. Surgical Masks vs. Cloth Masks: What's the Difference?

Protective face coverings have become common place

Cloth Masks



Good

Surgical Masks



Better

N95 Respirators



Best

1. Cloth masks can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses, but **they are not considered personal protective equipment (PPE)**.
 2. Cloth masks are intended to be cleaned and reused, while surgical masks and disposable N95 respirators are not.
 3. **Cloth masks are easy to obtain and simple to make at home.** On the other hand, surgical masks and N95 respirators can't be made at home and should be considered critical supplies, according to the CDC.
1. **Surgical masks provide better protection against airborne particles than cloth masks.** However, according to the CDC, **they don't provide the best protection from inhaling smaller airborne particles.**
 2. Surgical masks are cleared for use in medical settings by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
 3. Surgical masks are tested according to standards published by ASTM International as ASTM F2100-19.
 4. Surgical masks fall into three levels of barrier protection:
 - Level 1: low barrier protection
 - Level 2: moderate barrier protection
 - Level 3: maximum barrier protection
1. N95 respirators are typically disposable and are commonly referred to as filtering facepiece respirators.
 2. **N95 respirators offer more protection against airborne particles than surgical masks or cloth face covers,** because they are intended to be tight-fitting N95 masks are tested and certified by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to ensure that the filtering facepiece can remove at least **95% of airborne particles.**
 3. **N95 respirators are not to be worn by the general public as protection** from COVID-19 per the CDC, to help optimize the supply for frontline workers.