

Community Midwives, Masks, and COVID-19

We all want clear and accurate information about how to protect our clients and ourselves from COVID-19 in the midst of medical supply shortages. Here is the best information that we have for home birth and birth center midwives as of 3/30/2020.

- We should assume that we, our clients, and their support people could be asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19
- It can be protective for midwives to wear masks during all client contact during this outbreak, primarily to protect our clients from us as potential vectors (virus carriers who could transmit the disease), and secondarily to protect ourselves
- We specifically recommend that midwives wear masks at births
- N-95 masks are most effective against transmission of COVID-19 but they should be reserved for health care providers who are working with COVID-19 patients as there is a shortage and those most at-risk need to be prioritized
- Surgical masks do reduce the risk of transmission of viruses and are preferred over cloth masks for midwives at this time
- There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of cloth masks to reduce transmission of viruses but we recommend them if a surgical mask is not available as they do provide some protection (especially in terms of our clients' exposure from us)
 - Cloth masks should be washed and dried after each use
 - Cloth masks should be removed if the fabric becomes moist
- Please note that the 2015 MacIntyre et al. study of the use of cloth masks in Vietnam that has been circulating does not provide any useful information because the study design is deeply flawed (major unmeasured variation in mask use in control group, incredibly wide confidence interval, etc)
- No one is claiming that cloth masks are more protective than surgical masks but there is evidence that cloth masks are more protective than no mask.

Please see the CDC page on Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of Facemasks for more information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/face-masks.html>

References

Chughtai, A. A., Seale, H., & MacIntyre, C. R. (2013). Use of cloth masks in the practice of infection control—evidence and policy gaps. *Int J Infect Control*, 9(3).

Rengasamy, S., Eimer, B., & Shaffer, R. E. (2010). Simple respiratory protection—evaluation of the filtration performance of cloth masks and common fabric materials against 20–1000 nm size particles. *Annals of occupational hygiene*, 54(7), 789-798.

MacIntyre, C. R., Seale, H., Dung, T. C., Hien, N. T., Nga, P. T., Chughtai, A. A., ... & Wang, Q. (2015). A cluster randomised trial of cloth masks compared with medical masks in healthcare workers. *BMJ open*, 5(4), e006577.

Silke Akerson, CPM, LDM 3/30/2020