

Recommended Guidelines for use of Fabric Face Mask in the RSA: COVID-19

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Mahendra Shunmoogam, MA (Economic Policy)



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Guideline For Fabric Facemask – Rational

- Onset of a global Covid-19 pandemic DTIC with social partners (Business for SA & SACTWU) convened to consider publication of guidelines for the general public use of fabric masks.
- End March/April: WHO had not recommended or taken a position on Fabric Face Mask.
- In consultation with RSA's COVID-19 National Command centre, DTIC and social partners formed a working team to develop the recommended guidelines.
- Surgical masks and respirators where in short supply – wanted to establish uniform guideline for the manufacture & use of fabric facemasks.
- DTIC Published 09 April 2020 recommended guidelines – NDOH issued instruction on 17 April 2020 for general public to use fabric face masks.

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Research on Use & Purpose of Fabric Face Mask

- Reviewed guidelines/Actions of South Korea and Czech Republic: Guidelines and govt. decree to use fabric masks in public.
- Empirical research on best practices of other countries.
- Academic journals and national research institutions (ie. US National Academy of Sciences).
- University of Stellenbosch and Cape Peninsula University of Technology inputs on fabric qualities.

Purpose and Functionality of Fabric Face Masks

- Health risk mitigation – the person wearing the fabric face mask assumed to be COVID-19 positive – wearing the Fabric Face Mask to stop spread.
- Fabric Face Mask to be worn in conjunction with 1.5 physical distance, regular washing/use of sanitisers and other health hygiene protocols – and not as a stand alone one-stop health risk mitigation option.
- Safe storage, handling, & basic water, sanitation and hygiene requirements should be met.

Purpose and Functionality of Fabric Face Masks

- DTIC recommended clearly marked packaging to
 - Size, use and care details (how to clean, how to use and re-use instructions)
 - To ensure fit and comfort levels
 - Size
 - Hygiene protocol
 - Stipulate use for general public and not for a medical environment
- Research pending but evidence that fabric face masks that is worn by non-positive COVID-19 does potentially safeguards person breathing positive droplets in addition to the assumption that Covid-19 is not spread further.

Purpose and Functionality of Fabric Face Masks

- DTIC recommended
 - Tightly woven fabric so that water droplets with not be able to easily penetrate material, academic test on fabrics in circulation in SA proved that fabric face masks made in layers of 2 but preferably 3 did indeed provide a barrier efficiency.
 - Sustainable and non-toxic materials to be used – a list of local fabric manufacturers was provided.
 - Materials that can be washed with soap and water – at least 100 washes - and preferably to be iron with a hot iron after washing.
 - To cover half of your nose and to fit over your mouth, covering half of your chin.
 - To be a barrier for water droplets being expelled from wearer into air and surroundings.
 - For people working in high risk public exposure setting, such as shopping tills DTIC later recommended to Industry both fabric face masks as well as clear shields to be worn together.

Fabric Face Masks with valves, openings

- While these type of masks offer better Breathability to the user - it poses a health risk to public in general
 - The functionality and purpose of the fabric face mask is compromised.
 - Water droplets can be expelled and expose people to COVID-19 infection.
 - These masks give a false sense of security
- Valve Filtration efficiency and seal leakage rate tests are not proven – no standard exists with SABS.

Face Masks with valves and openings – NOT recommended

- United States CDC: does not recommend fabric face masks with Breathing valves or buffers <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>
- New Zealand Health: Advised against masks with valves: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-masks-and-face-coverings-community>
- DTIC considering issuing note to discourage fabric face masks with breathing valves

Questions ?

Contacts:

Mahendra Shunmoogam

The Department of Trade, Industry and Competition

063 688 6419

066 031 8958

mshunmoogam@thedtic.gov.za