

## COVID-19 Protection

### What Works...What Doesn't

Now that vaccines are more widely available and we are more than a year into this pandemic, there is a great deal of data and experience that we can rely on to show us what works and what isn't worth the time or money in terms of COVID protection. The following information was taken from a recent article which appeared in AARP's January/February Bulletin.

**Face Masks:** The more snug the fit and the more layers, the better.

**(A+) Surgical masks and multilayer cloth masks.** Medical grade, fluid-resistant paper masks are about 95% effective, as are cloth masks that are made up of several layers of material, says Timothy Brewer, M.D., professor of medicine and epidemiology at UCLA.

**(C+) Single-layer cloth.** These work less well for a simple reason: There's just not as much material between you and the microbe.

**(C) Plastic face shields.** "The face shield only reduces your risk by about 65%", says Professor Brewer, so you still need to wear a mask with it.

**(D) Gaiters.** They are also less effective because they tend to be single-layer cloth, and they usually do not offer a snug fit.

**(F) Scarf or bandanna.** Not only is the fabric a single layer, it most likely is not tight around the mouth and nose. Good fit matters.

**Hand Sanitizers:** In short, they work, and work well. The Centers for Disease Control recommends using one that is at least 60% alcohol.

**(X) Disposable Gloves.** Health care workers and those in food services use them, but they are also changing gloves regularly and using sanitizer on them. The fact is, viruses stick to gloves as well as skin, so if you are not very careful to swap them out repeatedly, you may actually be increasing your risk. Better to carry hand gel and use it often.

**(X) Sanitizing Packages.** Surfaces are less of a mechanism for transmission of the virus than thought originally. If you receive a package or haul in a load of groceries, simply unpack and then wash your hands thoroughly.

**Air Purifiers.** HEPA filters – both portable household units and HVAC filters – are effective against virus-size microbes and can also help filter out lung-irritating allergens. But while they may help, most filters are not able to circulate the air fast enough to provide sufficient protection by themselves. So even if you have filters in every room, you still need to add all the other standard precautions such as masks, good hygiene, and social distancing. If you can, open your windows during visits to ensure that air is moving around the room.

**(X) Air Ionizers.** Ionizers help improve air quality by negatively charging air particles so that they stick to nearby surfaces, thus “cleaning” the air. While research show they can be helpful with particulates in the air, like dust or mold, and may have some effect against some bacteria, there is zero data saying they help against viruses like the one that causes COVID-19. “They can be added to a HEPA filter, but their addition will be next to nothing,” says Michael Ison, M.D. an infectious disease specialist from Northwestern University.

**(X) Mouthwash.** If you are infected, you’re still sick and dangerous to others, no matter how “minty” your breath smells, because the virus is primarily transmitted from your nose.

**(X) Immune Boosters.** Several popular products claim to help boost immunity with mega doses of vitamin C, certain B vitamins and zinc. However, there is no evidence that these mega doses help to prevent or mitigate COVID-19 and because they are water soluble, in most cases, they are quickly eliminated from the body in urine.

**Vitamin D Pills.** This is the one vitamin worth supplementing, primarily because most of us do not get sufficient amounts from natural sources. Vitamin D deficiency is linked to higher risk of acute upper respiratory infection and is a common trait among COVID-19 patients. Doctors say to consider a daily supplement of 600 international units (IU), or 800 IU if you are older than 70.