

29 March 2020

APPEAL BY THE HEAD OF HEALTH FOR THE APPROPRIATE USE OF MASKS

Many people feel that they can protect themselves against COVID-19 (Coronavirus) by wearing personal protection equipment (PPE) such as gloves and masks as a precaution.

The Head of the Western Cape Health Department has issued an appeal to the general public of the province to not wear gloves and masks, due to the risks these items pose in spreading the coronavirus if not used properly.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is a scarce commodity and should be used appropriately and by the appropriate people. If you are not ill and not in close contact with someone who has Coronavirus, you do not need to wear a mask or gloves.

What is personal protective equipment (PPE)?

Personal protective equipment is a wide term for items, such as surgical face masks, N95 respirators, aprons, face shields or visors, goggles, and gloves, that protect against different types of risk. PPE is used when treating people who have an infectious disease, cleaning or removing waste.

Who must wear PPE?

Risk determines what personal protection equipment to wear. In general, PPE such as masks and gloves, are only needed if you are in direct contact with- or caring for a person who is confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19, at home or in a health facility. This is part of infection control.

Scientific evidence proves that by wearing a mask, if it is not needed, you may put yourself at higher risk because you fiddle with the mask and then transfer germs from your hands to your face.

Wearing a mask or gloves when going to the supermarket or pharmacy to buy essentials, is ineffective, unnecessary, and will not protect you from the Coronavirus. In fact, it can spread infection faster.

The Health Department has developed clear guidelines for the general public. It advises the public to practice good hand hygiene, not touch your face, and to keep a distance of 1.5 metres from other people when you have to leave your home for essential items or medical care. Members of the public should also strictly obey the conditions of the current lockdown by staying at home unless necessary – to not do so is breaking the law.

To reiterate, **for the general public no PPE is needed.**

You do not need to wear a mask in public if you are not ill. In fact, if you do not feel well, stay at home. If you have flu-like symptoms, call the national hotline at 0800 029 999 or the provincial hotline at 021 928 4102.

We are aware that certain national policies have a requirement for staff to wear certain PPE items, for example masks. We are engaging those bodies with expert advice to make sure PPE is used appropriately.

For more information on do's and don'ts of Coronavirus, visit our website on www.westerncape.gov.za/coronavirus

Together, let's stop the spread.

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