

## UPDATE ALERT

**Update Alert: Use of N95, Surgical, or Cloth Masks to Prevent COVID-19 in Health Care and Community Settings: Living Practice Points From the American College of Physicians (Version 1)**

This letter serves as a brief update and notification to retire the American College of Physicians' (ACP) living practice points on the use of N95, surgical, or cloth masks to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in health care and community settings (1) from living status. The decision to retire these practice points from living status was made in light of several considerations. Since the initial publication, 2 surveillance reports for the rapid, living review have been published (2, 3) and both determined that the new evidence does not change the conclusions of the original evidence report (4). Through 2 August 2020, two new observational studies were identified: 1 on mask use and risk for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection in community settings (insufficient evidence) (2) and 1 on mask use and risk for SARS-CoV-2 infection in a health care setting (insufficient evidence) (3). The ACP's Scientific Medical Policy Committee (SMPC) reviewed the surveillance reports and determined that, in the absence of any conclusive evidence, an update to the current practice points is not warranted at this time (1). Given that the past 2 updates have identified only 2 new studies of poor methodological quality, the SMPC considers this a signal that the likelihood of new evidence emerging in the near future that would lead to a change in the practice points is low. In addition, the practice points on this topic were initially developed to meet a priority need for decision making. However, with the increased alignment in guidance from key health organizations (such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [5] and World Health Organization [6]), the implementation of community and statewide guidelines, and the widespread adherence to such guidelines in community and health care settings, the SMPC has determined that maintaining this topic as living is no longer a priority for decision making.

Amir Qaseem, MD, PhD, MHA  
Itziar Etxeandia-Ikobaltzeta, PharmD, PhD  
American College of Physicians, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Jennifer Yost, RN, PhD  
American College of Physicians, Philadelphia, and Villanova University, Villanova, Pennsylvania

Linda L. Humphrey, MD, MPH  
Portland Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, Oregon

**Financial Support:** Financial support for the development of the practice points and update alerts for it comes exclusively from the ACP operating budget.

**Disclosures:** Disclosures can also be viewed at [www.acponline.org/authors/icmje/ConflictOfInterestForms.do?msNum=L20-1268](http://www.acponline.org/authors/icmje/ConflictOfInterestForms.do?msNum=L20-1268).

**Corresponding Author:** Amir Qaseem, MD, PhD, MHA, American College of Physicians, 190 N Independence Mall West, Philadelphia, PA 19106; e-mail, [aqaseem@acponline.org](mailto:aqaseem@acponline.org).

doi:10.7326/L20-1268

**References**

1. Qaseem A, Etxeandia-Ikobaltzeta I, Yost J, et al. Use of N95, surgical, and cloth masks to prevent COVID-19 in health care and community settings: living practice points from the American College of Physicians (version 1). *Ann Intern Med.* 2020;173:642-649. [PMID: 32551813] doi:10.7326/M20-3234
2. Wang Y, Tian H, Zhang L, et al. Reduction of secondary transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in households by face mask use, disinfection and social distancing: a cohort study in Beijing, China. *BMJ Glob Health.* 2020;5:e002794. [PMID: 32467353] doi:10.1136/bmjgh-2020-002794
3. Chatterjee P, Anand T, Singh KJ, et al. Healthcare workers & SARS-CoV-2 infection in India: a case-control investigation in the time of COVID-19. *Indian J Med Res.* 2020;151:459-467. [PMID: 32611916] doi:10.4103/ijmr.IJMR\_2234\_20
4. Chou R, Dana T, Jungbauer R, et al. Masks for prevention of respiratory virus infections, including SARS-CoV-2, in health care and community settings: a living rapid review. *Ann Intern Med.* 2020;173:542-555. [PMID: 32579379] doi:10.7326/M20-3213
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Considerations for wearing masks. Accessed at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html) on 24 September 2020.
6. World Health Organization. Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19. Interim guidance 5 June 2020. Accessed at <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1279750/retrieve> on 9 June 2020.

This article was published at [Annals.org](https://annals.org) on 27 October 2020.