You’ve heard so much about masks in recent months. It is important to understand that there is a lot of misinformation out there. Although masks may be inconvenient and even uncomfortable, they do keep your loved ones, others, and yourself safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people wear masks pretty much anywhere you’re around other people. If you have an opportunity to visit a loved one in a post-acute or long-term care (PALTC) facility, you must wear a mask even if you’re physically distancing.

What kind of mask should you wear? The CDC suggests cloth or disposable paper masks with two or more layers. To be effective, they must be worn over both the nose and mouth and be secured under your chin. Masks should be worn by anyone older than two years.

Some people find clear plastic face shields more comfortable. However, the CDC doesn’t recommend wearing these alone. Face shields are still being studied for effectiveness; so for now, if you wear a shield, you should also wear a mask.

When you visit a loved one in a PALTC setting, even if it’s a “through the window” event, you should nod, clap your hands, give a thumbs-up, and use other gestures to express your feelings.

Anyone who comes into a facility must wear a cloth face covering, face mask, or a surgical mask at all times while on-site. Remember, while masks help protect you and also those around you from airborne particles that carry the COVID-19 virus and other germs, they are not a substitute for physical distancing. If you are visiting your loved one,

- Stay at least six feet apart, and wear a mask.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol several times a day, especially when you’ve been outside, touched door handles or other objects, and touched or removed your mask.
- Throw away your disposable mask as soon as you have removed it. Thoroughly clean your reusable masks after each use.

Although there has been promising news on vaccines recently, these are not broadly available yet. Wearing masks now will enable you to have many more visits, hugs, and memories with your older loved ones in the future.

### Questions to Ask Your Practitioner
- At the beginning of the pandemic, experts said not to wear a mask. What’s changed?
- When will it be safe not to wear a mask?
- Can I just wear a bandana or scarf over my mouth and nose?
- I’m healthy, so why do I have to wear a mask?

### What You Can Do
- Find a mask (cloth or disposable) that is most comfortable for you.
- Make sure your loved one in a PALTC facility has access to masks. If your loved ones seem confused by the use of masks, reassure them that wearing masks helps to keep everyone healthy and safe.
- Always wear a clean mask.

If you can’t afford to buy masks, talk to your practitioner or other professional about where you might be able to get them.

### For More Information

©2020 AMDA – The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine.