

USAGE OF PERSONAL PROTECTION DURING HAZE



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Personal Protection

Personal protection is required when going outdoors during a haze. The appropriate protection is a device that prevents the inhaling of airborne particles causing the haze. The various protections commonly used are the surgical face mask and the respirator. Airborne particles causing haze may be as small as 2.5 microns. The use of the surgical mask will not prevent one from inhaling the small airborne particles. Therefore the recommended protection is the use of the respirator.

Use of Respirators

A respirator is a protective device worn covering the nose and mouth and is used to reduce the wearer's risk of inhaling hazardous airborne particles. Respirators work better than surgical masks as they seal better and restrict more polluted air from entering the nose and mouth. They also come with the right filter to remove fine particles found in a haze. The N95 respirator may be used as protection during the haze. The respirator filters the small airborne particles and can reduce exposure to the haze. The N95 mask is effective only if used correctly.

The use of N95 masks increases effort in breathing.

For some people, the use of N95 mask may cause discomfort breathing, tiredness or headache. This may be due to the mask causing increased resistance to breathing, and a reduction in the volume of air breathed. For most people this is not serious however in precautions must be taken in certain categories of people.

Precautions to Using the Respirator

- Elderly people, people with lung or heart conditions
- People with claustrophobia
- People with lung diseases such as asthma or emphysema
- Women in the later stages of pregnancy
- Children

N95 mask is not suitable for pregnant women and children. Persons with chronic lung or heart conditions who feel uncomfortable when wearing the N95 masks should stop doing so and consult a doctor before carrying on.

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Wearing The N95 Face Mask

Here are the steps to properly wear the N95 face mask :

1. Cup the mask in one hand. Leave the two straps alone but make sure they are out of the way.
2. Cover your nose and mouth with the mask, making sure it covers your nose and mouth completely, and the two straps are not in the way.
3. Take the upper strap and pull it over your head. Adjust it so that it lies above the ear.
4. Take the lower strap and pull it over your head. Adjust it so that it lies below the ear.
5. Pinch the metal strap on the top of the mask so that it conforms to the shape of your nose. This moulds the mask so that air cannot come in from the sides of your nose.
6. Breathe in and out deeply. You should not feel air coming in from the edges of the face mask. Adjust the mask until you are breathing in only through the face mask, and not from the sides. When properly fitted, breathing through the N95 face mask will take some effort.

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Wearing A Surgical Face Mask

1. If possible, get the plain strap version of the surgical mask. The ear loop version is easier to wear but cannot be tightened to fit the face tightly.

2. In the usual 3-ply surgical mask, the cotton filter is in the middle, with an inner water-absorbent layer and an outer water-resistant layer. However, this is of no consequence when dealing with air pollution, so it doesn't matter which way you wear it, as long as the metal strap is at the top.

Despite what people tell you, wearing the white side outwards won't block the dust (or viruses for the matter) anymore than wearing the white side on the inside will. Of course, there are good reasons why doctors wear the coloured side out, but as far as the haze is concerned, it's pretty much the same thing even if you flip it.

3. When you wear the surgical mask, cover as much of nose and mouth as possible. The top should extend right up to the bridge of the nose, while the bottom should wrap under your chin or even to your neck.

4. Squeeze the metal strap at the top of the surgical mask to conform to the shape of your nose.

5. Tie the straps as tightly as possible. Optimally, you should breathe through the surgical mask, not from the sides of it.

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If You Have Nothing

If you cannot find a face mask of any sort, don't panic. A wet face towel works just as well, if not better, than a surgical face mask. You can also wrap a wet scarf around your neck.

These cloth-based ad hoc air filters aren't very effective dry but if you wet them, they are pretty good at filtering out the pollutants in the air.

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