



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™

Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Protecting Babies and Young Children from Contagious Illnesses Without Masks

Face masks are a type of personal protective equipment (PPE). They are used to protect people from germs in the air that are contagious (spread from person to person) and can cause illness. Masks also help to prevent the spread of germs picked up from liquids, such as body fluids, that can carry infection. If these germs get onto a person's face, they can easily be rubbed into the mouth, nose or eyes and spread infection to other parts of the body.

You should never use a mask on a child under the age of 2 years.

It is harder for people to breathe with something covering the nose and mouth. Since babies and children younger than 2 years have smaller airways, breathing through a mask is even harder for them than it is for an older child or an adult.

- If an infant is having a hard time breathing, they cannot take a mask off themselves. If they go without air they could die.
- Masks are supposed to fit snugly. If the fit is too tight, a baby or child under the age of 2 will not be able to breathe enough air. A loose fit will not give much protection.
- It would be hard to keep an older infant or young toddler from pulling a mask off. When they do, they will touch their face.

For these reasons, there are no face masks approved for young children.

How to protect your infant

- Avoid unnecessary public contact. Keep yourself, your baby and any siblings at least 6 feet away from other people. If you cannot leave an infant or young child supervised at home and you must go out in public, keep the outing short.

- If you must take your baby out in public, cover the infant carrier (**NOT THE INFANT**) with a blanket. This helps protect the baby, but still allows them to breathe comfortably.
- Do not leave your child alone ever. Do not leave the blanket on the carrier when you get back in the car, or at any time when the baby and carrier are not in your direct view.
- Keep your hands clean. Frequent hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds is best. If you cannot wash your hands, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol is the next best substitute.
- Remember to always wash your hands (and any siblings' hands) as soon as you get home.
- Use a disinfectant wipe or spray several times every day to clean surfaces at home that are touched often. These surfaces include doorknobs, handles, light switches and electronics.
- If you are wearing clean medical gloves while in public, use hand sanitizer to keep them clean. Remove them when you get in your car. If you are using public transportation, remove the gloves when you get home.
- Teach older children to avoid touching their faces.

How to breastfeed with symptoms of illness

You can continue to breastfeed your baby. To decrease the chance of spreading the illness to them:

- Make sure you wash your hands before touching your baby.
- Wear a mask when holding or breastfeeding your baby.
- If you are pumping, wash your hands before and after touching the pump, pump parts or bottle parts.
- Clean all parts after use:
 - Clean the parts that are washable with hot soapy water.
 - Use disinfectant wipes on the parts that are not washable, such as wall plug, motor, electric cords, etc. Allow it to dry completely.