

Use of masks in the massage therapy setting



**My mask protects you.
Your mask protects me.**

Infection control refers to policies and procedures practised in healthcare facilities to minimise the risk of transmitting and acquiring infectious diseases. Source control is a term used to describe measures that are intended to prevent infected individuals from spreading disease. In the massage therapy clinical setting, the main rationale for practitioners to wear a mask is related to source control – to reduce the likelihood of transmitting a virus to the client.

The principle behind masks as source control is to limit the amount of infectious particles that are put out into the air by breathing, talking and coughing etc. The aim is to minimise the amount of free floating droplets in the environment.

Source control can also be applied to clients and staff of a clinic.

Types of masks

N95 or P2 respirator masks

An N95 respirator or P2 respirator is a tight-fitting protective device designed to achieve a very close facial fit and filter out a high percentage of the smallest airborne particles and droplets. They provide the highest level of protection for health professionals working with infected patients.

The 95 in N95 (also KN95) refers to the level of protection from airborne particles that the inner layer of the mask is capable of providing the wearer. Unlike a surgical face mask, N95 and P2 masks are designed to not only limit the wearer's potential for spreading infection but also limit the wearer's potential for contracting infection.

Given how transmissible the COVID variants of concern are, AMT strongly recommends the use of N95 respirators by practitioners when treating clients, and when cleaning/disinfecting to protect both themselves and clients from aerosol transmission of COVID.

Please be aware that some N95 masks are single use only - read the manufacturer's guidelines for appropriate care of your mask and replace the mask as recommended. If you must reuse your mask several times during the day, follow meticulous [donning and doffing](#), including hand hygiene to prevent soilage and contamination. In between uses, the mask should be carefully stored to prevent potential cross contamination of other surfaces.

A protocol of [numbering and rotating N95 masks](#) to enable reuse of a single mask up to 5 times could be employed, as long as there is at least 4 days between uses. (The virus does not remain viable on the mask after 3 days). Proper storage for this technique requires either hanging the masks to dry, or keeping them in a clean, breathable container like a paper bag between uses. N95/P2 masks can be worn for up to 8 hours continuously.

Do not wear a mask with an exhalation valve. Masks with an exhalation valve will expose clients (and the environment generally) to potentially infectious aerosols.

N95/P2 masks are designed to fit close to the face. Trying a number of different brands is advised to determine which fits best on your face. Beards and facial hair will compromise the seal and level of protection.

Search the [Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods](#) to ensure that the masks you purchase are appropriately rated.

N95/P2 mask rotation template

Number masks, store in a labelled paper bag when not in use, and discard after 5 uses.

Day 1	Week 1	Mask 1
Day 2	Week 1	Mask 2
Day 3	Week 1	Mask 3
Day 4	Week 1	Mask 4
Day 5	Week 1	Mask 5
Day 1	Week 2	Mask 1
Day 2	Week 2	Mask 2
Day 3	Week 2	Mask 3
Day 4	Week 2	Mask 4
Day 5	Week 2	Mask 5
Day 1	Week 3	Mask 1
Day 2	Week 3	Mask 2
Day 3	Week 3	Mask 3
Day 4	Week 3	Mask 4
Day 5	Week 3	Mask 5
Day 1	Week 4	Mask 1
Day 2	Week 4	Mask 2
Day 3	Week 4	Mask 3
Day 4	Week 4	Mask 4
Day 5	Week 4	Mask 5
Day 1	Week 5	Mask 1
Day 2	Week 5	Mask 2
Day 3	Week 5	Mask 3
Day 4	Week 5	Mask 4
Day 5	Week 5	Mask 5

REPLACE ALL MASKS AT THE END OF WEEK 5

Surgical masks

A surgical mask is a loose-fitting, disposable device that creates a physical barrier between the mouth and nose of the wearer and potential contaminants in the immediate environment. They provide some barrier protection against droplets that may carry infectious diseases. Although they do not offer airtight protection to the wearer due to leakage around the edges of the mask during inhalation, they do help to prevent transmission from the wearer to others in close proximity.

Surgical masks are often referred to as facemasks, although not all facemasks are regulated whereas surgical masks are.

If an N95 or P2 mask is not available, massage therapists must wear surgical masks that are [TGA approved](#) as part of transmission based precautions.

Surgical masks are single use only and should be changed between clients..

Reusable cloth masks

AMT does not recommend the use of cloth masks by practitioners in a clinical setting.

Like surgical masks, cloth masks offer some barrier protection but will not filter out small particles. Although the evidence for cloth masks as source control in general community settings is now quite strong, there is not enough evidence yet to support their routine use by practitioners in healthcare settings. The lack of standardised manufacturing and composition makes it difficult to test their efficacy and utility for clinical use. Experimental and clinical evidence may help to establish recognised standards for the manufacture of cloth masks that perform comparably with TGA-approved surgical masks but, until there is an agreed standard, it is not possible to make a generalised endorsement for their use in the clinic setting.

Type		Protection for wearer	Protection for others	Uses
N95/P2 respirator masks		Yes	Yes	Recommended for use in massage therapy clinical setting.
N95 with valve		Yes	No	Should not be used in the massage therapy clinical setting.
Surgical mask		Some	Yes	TGA approved. Single use product. Use only when N95/P2 masks are unavailable.
Cloth mask		Some	Yes	3 layer, washable. Not recommended in clinical settings. .

Face Shields

Evaluation of face shields is ongoing but AMT does not recommend their use. If face shields are used, they must be worn with an N95/P2 mask to prevent the downward stream of respiratory droplets towards the client.

Donning and doffing

[Watch this video](#) for a brief demonstration of how to don and doff a face mask.

1. Wash your hands with soap or sanitise with alcohol-based hand rub before touching the mask.
2. Using the ear loops or ties, place the mask over your nose and mouth, and adjust the nose piece so the mask fits comfortably and securely.
3. Avoid touching the mask. If you do touch the mask or it becomes damp, replace it.
4. To take off the mask, wash your hands and carefully remove the mask from behind by the ear loops or straps.
5. Wash your hands again.