

Corona – Correct use of face masks at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum

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In order to protect yourself and others from an infection with the Coronavirus, the wearing of face masks in particular has proven to be a very effective measure, in addition to other measures such as reducing contact, keeping your distance, regular ventilation, rules for coughing and sneezing and good hand hygiene.

Therefore, after the expiry of the „SARS-CoV-2-Arbeitsschutzverordnung“ (SARS-CoV-2 occupational health and safety regulation), the „Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales“ (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) recommends continuing to wear face masks (surgical masks or FFP2 masks) inside buildings in all public areas and in rooms shared with other people (offices, kitchenettes, copying rooms, workshops, toilets, meeting rooms, ...), as it might not be possible to keep the recommended minimum distance to other people.

From 1st June, 2022, the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (RUB) will implement an urgent recommendation to continue to comply with the previous protective measures, including the wearing of masks, in particular to protect vulnerable students and employees. Although there is no longer a legal obligation to do so, RUB continues to provide surgical and FFP2 masks to employees.

Detailed information on surgical masks and FFP2 masks can be found on the internet on the website of the „[Bundesinstituts für Arzneimittel und Medizinprodukte \(BfArM\)](#)“. These are summarised below:

Surgical masks („OP“ masks)

Surgical face masks are disposable products, i.e. to be disposed of at the end of the working day, or even before in the case of heavy soaking. They consist of a multi-layer filtering plastic fleece. The front side (outside) is usually coloured, the back side (inside) is colourless.

When tightly fitted, the surgical face masks not only protect the other person (external protection), but can also protect the wearer of the masks from direct contact with exhaled droplets from another person or from direct contact with contaminated hands (self-protection). However, they generally offer less protection against aerosols containing pathogens than particle-filtering half masks (FFP).

Particle-filtering half masks (FFP or comparable):

Particle-filtering half masks (e.g. FFP2 masks) are personal protective equipment (PPE) in the context of occupational health and safety. They protect the wearer of the mask from particles, droplets and aerosols. Correctly fitted FFP masks without an exhalation valve filter both the inhaled air and the exhaled air across the mask surface and therefore offer good self-protection in addition to protecting other people.

Therefore, these masks should be preferred in case of prolonged and/or close personal contacts with less than the minimum distance, as well as in rooms with increased aerosol concentrations (e.g. when many people are in a confined space), and for contacts with known or potentially infectious persons (e.g. contacts).

Particle-filtering half masks must fit close to the face for good protection. The protective effect is usually significantly reduced for persons wearing beards, as air is inhaled and exhaled next to the mask due to leakage.

Due to the increased respiratory resistance, the maximum wearing time should be limited and breaks in wearing time should be specified for FFP masks. However, this depends on the activity (e.g. working environment, severity of work, ...) as well as the individual health situation of the wearer of the mask (e.g. previous illnesses; also see statement of the Committee for Occupational Medicine (AfAMed) on wearing time limits for FFP2 masks of 6th December, 2021). When assessing whether and for how long pregnant women may/should wear FFP2 masks at the workplace, the company doctor must be involved.

FFP2 masks are intended by the manufacturer as single-use products and not for reuse. However, if used for a short period of time, there are no objections to multiple use. Between uses, however, the FFP mask must be well ventilated to dry it and stored so that the inside is not contaminated. Under no circumstances should FFP2 masks be processed in the microwave, washing machine, dishwasher or using UV light.

Short instructions for donning and doffing medical face masks and particle filtering half masks (FFP):

- Handle masks with clean hands and only at the edges or ear straps.
- Ensure a tight fit over the mouth, nose and cheeks (tight-fitting edges, pre-bend wire nose clip, adjust ear straps individually if necessary).
- When using the mask several times, keep it aired and dry in between and put it back on with the inside facing inwards.
- Change soaked mask.
- Change masks regularly.
- Dispose used masks in the residual waste.

Sources:

- BMAS: Betrieblicher Infektionsschutz – Empfehlungen des BMAS zum betrieblichen Infektionsschutz nach Auslaufen der SARS-CoV-2 Arbeitsschutzverordnung (27.05.2022) <https://www.bmas.de/DE/Corona/Fragen-und-Antworten/Fragen-und-Antworten-ASVO/faq-corona-asvo.html#doc89168596-e024-487b-980f-e8d076006499bodyText3>
- Hinweise des BfArM zur Verwendung von Mund-Nasen-Bedeckungen, medizinischen Gesichtsmasken sowie partikelfiltrierenden Halbmasken (FFP-Masken) <https://www.bfarm.de/SharedDocs/Risikoinformationen/Medizinprodukte/DE/schutzmasken.html>
- Stellungnahme des Ausschusses für Arbeitsmedizin (AfAMed) zu Tragezeitbegrenzungen für FFP2-Masken vom 06.12.2021)
- <https://www.baua.de/DE/Aufgaben/Geschaefsfuehrung-von-Ausschuessen/AfAMed/pdf/Stellungnahme-Tragezeit-FFP2-Masken.pdf?blob=publicationFile&v=3>