

Face masks: Surgical vs. Respirator

The use of masks in the context of COVID-19 is a complicated matter. There are different standards that need to be followed, depending on the type of dental procedures to be performed. The World Health Organization gives Interim Guidance for their usage, based on the different types of masks: Surgical or Filtering Facepiece Respirator (FFP). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also released prevention and control guidance especially fitted towards the dental profession. We encourage you to review the resources on the COVID-19-section of the DS Community to [learn more](#) about these important infection prevention guidelines.

Surgical Masks

Surgical masks are generally recommended in health care settings. It is important to remember that the use of masks should be combined with other key infection prevention and control measures such as hand hygiene and physical distancing, as they alone do not serve all purposes to protect against COVID-19.

If there is no respirator available for aerosol-generating procedures the use of both a surgical mask and a full-face shield is needed. Dental Health Care Professionals should wear a surgical mask, eye protection (goggles, protective eyewear, or a full-face shield) and protective clothing. Always use the highest level of surgical mask available. If these protective measures are not available – do not perform any aerosol-generating procedures.



Figure 1 Surgical face mask

Filtering Facepiece Respirator (FFP) Masks

When performing or working in settings where aerosol-generating procedures are taking place using a particulate respirator at least as protective as a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) certified N95, European Union standard FFP2 or equivalents.

During aerosol-generating procedures conducted on patients assumed to be non-contagious, the use of an N95 respirator (or equivalents) or one that offers even a higher level of protection (PAPRs, elastomeric respirators, etc.) can be considered. Respirators should be used in the context of respiratory protection programs, including medical evaluations, training and fit testing.



Figure 2 Filtering Facepiece Respirator (FFP) or N95