H1N1

The **Facts** About **Facemasks**

KNOW what to do about the FLU!

With both the novel H1N1(swine flu) and seasonal flu viruses causing illness this year, you may wonder if you should wear a facemask (surgical mask) or N-95 respirator mask if you will be in close contact with others in public places. **While facemasks are appropriate in certain settings to help reduce the spread of germs, they are not needed for general use.** Only people who perform certain medical procedures need to wear an N-95 respirator. Relying on a facemask could cause people to forget to do other things that are even more important to help prevent the flu – like hand washing and coughing into a tissue or your sleeve, not your hands. It is important to remember to get both the seasonal flu vaccine and the novel H1N1 flu vaccine when it is available.

So, when should you wear a facemask?

- When you are seeking medical treatment for flu-like symptoms. If you don't have a facemask, let the receptionist or nurse know right away if you have flu-like symptoms such as cough, fever, sore throat and muscle aches. You may be asked to wear a mask to avoid infecting others.
- Before you go out in public with flu-like symptoms.
- When you are sick with the flu, wear a facemask when you are in the common areas of your home around other people.
- If you have the flu and you are breastfeeding your doctor may suggest that you wear a facemask so that you don't give the flu to your baby.
- If you are a designated caregiver for someone who has the flu and are at high risk of serious complications from the flu you may want to wear a facemask.

Because a facemask will restrict the flow of air, a facemask should NOT be used by people who already have difficulty breathing due to an existing medical condition, such as asthma or emphysema.

Where can you get a facemask?

Facemasks are sold in pharmacies, hardware and home improvement stores, medical supply stores or through the Internet. **Remember: facemask use – by itself – can't prevent the flu.**

- **ALWAYS** wash your hands immediately after you take off a mask. Use soap and water, if possible, or alcohol-based hand sanitizer if you are not near a sink.
- Don't handle your facemask and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Change your facemask whenever it gets moist. Never wear a mask for longer than one day.
- Cloth facemasks may be laundered using hot water but disposable facemasks can be used just once and then thrown away.

Face the facts!

Facemasks will do little to reduce the spread of flu unless they are used properly and by the people who really need them. If you must take care of someone with the flu, and are at high risk of serious illness if you get sick, you should wear a mask. A better choice, if at all possible, is to have someone else be the designated caregiver. If you have the flu and must be around other people, you should wear a facemask.

More information about the flu is available at **www.nyhealth.gov** and **www.flu.gov.**