

Covid-19 pandemic: enhanced barrier measures during containment and in the ex-containment phase

Press release of the French National Academy of Medicine

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In the Far East, for many years now, the wearing of anti-projection masks by the population has been both a preventive measure and an act of good citizenship in the event of an epidemic of respiratory tropism (particularly in the countries most affected by the SARS virus in 2003). In the face of the Covid-19 epidemic, this measure contributed to a reduction in the reproductive rate in Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea.

There is evidence that incubating or asymptomatic carriers shed the virus and maintain transmission of infection. In France, in this context, the generalised wearing of masks by the population would be a logical addition to the barrier measures currently in force.

Recommendations of the National Academy of Medicine:

- In a situation of mask shortage¹ and when the priority for the allocation of FFP2 masks and surgical masks acquired by the State must go to health structures (health establishments, medico-social establishments, health professionals in the liberal sector) and to the most exposed professionals, the National Academy of Medicine recommends that the wearing of a "general public" mask, also known as an "alternative" mask, be made compulsory for necessary outings during periods of confinement;

- As the epidemic curve decreases, the willingness of public authorities to mitigate as much as possible the economic and social impact of the pandemic will lead to a decision to lift the confinement of the population at home. In order that the lifting of the confinement can be as early and as risky as possible, the National Academy of Medicine stresses the importance that this lifting of the confinement be accompanied by the maintenance of the barrier measures currently recommended until the circulation of the virus is controlled, as attested by the absence of new cases declared for a period of 14 days. As part of this lifting of containment, the mandatory wearing of a "general public" or "alternative" mask by the population should be maintained;

- In France, it has not been customary to build up a small stock of anti-projection masks in each household. As the shortage of masks is likely to last a few more weeks, a "general public" or "alternative" mask must be used for the time being and in order to escape the containment. The National Academy of Medicine recommends that the practical indications for the manufacture of such a mask^{2,3,4} be widely publicised.

¹ Avis Masques and Covid-19 of the National Academy of Medicine, March 23, 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Lg0jnJ3hEo>

² Courtesy of Prof. Daniel Garin, former head of the virology department of the Army Health Service Research Centre.

³ French Society of Sterilization Sciences <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkEWqKntdSc>

⁴ Opinion of the Société française des sciences de la stérilisation and the Société française d'hygiène hospitalière concerning alternative materials used in the manufacture of protective masks, 21 March 2020