

WHO Guidelines on Facemask

Why in news?

World Health Organisation's (WHO) revised guidelines advises that the facemasks should be worn in public to stop the spread of COVID-19.

What are the previous guidelines?

- So far, the WHO had maintained that there was not enough evidence to suggest that healthy individuals should wear masks.
- It had also encouraged the use of medical facemasks only by those who were sick or caring for the sick.

What are the new WHO guidelines?

- WHO has updated its guidance keeping in mind evolving evidence.
- It has developed this guidance through a review of all available evidence, and extensive consultation with experts and civil society groups.
- In the revised guidelines, the WHO suggests that everyone should wear fabric masks (non-medical) in public.
- Fabric masks should contain at least three layers of different materials.
- On the other hand, any person showing the Covid-19 symptoms should wear a medical mask apart from self-isolating and seeking medical advice as soon as they feel unwell.
- It has advised governments to encourage the public to wear masks where there is a widespread transmission and physical distancing is difficult.
- Further, in areas with widespread transmission, WHO advises medical masks for all people working in clinical areas of a health facility and not just workers dealing with patients with COVID-19.

Are there any disadvantages of encouraging the public to wear masks?

- The WHO mentions some potential harms and disadvantages of the use of facemasks by healthy people in the general public.
- There is an increased risk of self-contamination due to manipulation of a facemask.
- There is a possibility of potential self-contamination if non-medical masks are not changed when soiled or wet.
- There may be potential headache or breathing difficulties.

- Using mask may give a false sense of security, leading to lower adherence to other critical preventive measures such as physical distancing and hand hygiene.

What are the facemask guidelines around the world?

- **India:** The Centre is allowing re-opening of malls, hotels, restaurants and places of worship from June 8.
- So, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued standard operating procedures (SOPs) for these to contain the spread of the Covid-19.
- As per these guidelines, wearing masks is compulsory for those entering religious places, restaurants, offices and shopping malls.
- **US:** The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains that everyone should wear a cloth face cover when they go out in public but not use face masks meant for healthcare workers.
- **Spain:** Spain has made wearing masks compulsory both indoors and in public spaces wherever social distancing is not possible.
- Children below the age of six years and those having respiratory illness are exempt from this rule.
- **Singapore:** The government recommends that masks should be worn whenever people step outside their homes, when they use public transport or hire private cars, walk to or in markets.
- Essential workers should wear masks when they are at their workplaces.
- Masks should only be removed during strenuous exercise outdoors such as running, but must be put back on once the exercise is over.
- Anyone caught without a mask will be issued fines of \$300 and repeat offenders are liable to pay higher fines or face prosecution.

What does the evidence say?

- The dominant scientific opinion now says that even a simple home-made masks can offer a great degree of protection against Covid-19.
- A study pointed out that the use of home-made masks was adequate to prevent community transmission of the disease.
- Even so, the lead author of this study maintains that wearing masks should not lead people to ignore physical distancing rules.
- In its new guidelines, the WHO has said that masks can be used either
 1. For protection of healthy persons (worn to protect oneself when in contact with an infected individual) or
 2. For source control (worn by an infected individual to prevent onward transmission)

Source: The Indian Express

