

Using FFP2 masks correctly

Research institute of the Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung (German Social Casualty Insurance, DGUV) provides advice

(Information based on a press release by DGUV of 19th January, 2021)

So-called FFP2 masks are currently compulsory in public, e.g. when shopping and on public transport. Many people have doubts regarding the correct use of these masks. The Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the German Social Casualty Insurance (IFA) provides important advice on the use and reuse of the respiratory protection products.

- **Follow instructions for use:** Regular FFP2 masks tested according to EN 149 may only be sold with instructions for use in German. These describe exactly how to put on the mask. Therefore, when purchasing the mask, you should ask for the instructions for use, which must accompany the smallest commercially available pack, and read them carefully before first use. This is the only way to achieve the optimal protective effect of the mask.
- **Shaving:** Many people do not know: Often it is not the filter material that is the problem, but the tight fit. For a mask to be effective, it must fit snugly against the face. Beards or scarring in the area of the mask seal line therefore impair the protective effect of FFP2 masks.
- **Check tight fit:** When taking a breath, the mask should be pulled against the face. If, on the other hand, you feel airflow against your face, the mask is not a good fit.
- **Pay attention to hygiene:** Masks marked FFP2 R are reusable. How long and how often this is possible is determined primarily by how the mask is handled. Special care must be taken to ensure the greatest possible hygiene. Put the mask on and take it off without touching the inside or the sealing rim and store it in a well-ventilated place after use. In this case, repeated short-term use for several days is possible.
- **If necessary, seek medical advice:** Most of the time, FFP2 masks are put on only for riding the bus or train or shopping at the supermarket. For most people, the associated handicap should not be critical. Those who are unsure because of health impairments should talk to their family doctor.

The IFA expert advises against the tips circulating in many places for reprocessing masks for reuse. It cannot be ruled out that such treatments substantially impair, or ruin completely, the filter function.

Background information on FFP2 masks

Class FFP2 respirators protect those who wear them; they therefore fall into the category of personal protective equipment. This distinguishes them from mouth and nose coverings and medical face protection (surgical masks). The main purpose of the latter is to protect other people. Only FFP2 masks without a valve also protect other people from possible pathogens in the exhaled air of the person wearing the mask.

The current occupational health and safety regulation recommends a wearing time of 75 minutes with a subsequent recovery period of 30 minutes for particle-filtering half masks without an exhalation valve. **In the case of light physical work the mask can be worn up to 3 hours.**