

Instructions for precautionary measures and personal protection, in a community, against infection from COVID-19 virus

Measures for personal protection in a community:

In order to provide correct information to the public, the Unit for Epidemiological Monitoring and Control of Infectious Diseases and the members of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health would like to state the following with regard to the issue of personal protection measures in public places (e.g. supermarkets, open air markets, pharmacies, banks and other work places).

The choice to apply additional measures of personal protection, such as wearing gloves or a mask, is absolutely supplementary and should not replace the need to apply the remaining recommended protective measures which have a bigger impact on reducing the risk of spreading the virus Sars-CoV2.

It is reminded that these measures are the following: keeping a distance of 2 metres from other people, avoiding gatherings in closed areas, keeping your hands clean (either with soap and water or with an alcoholic solution) and avoiding touching your face with your hands (with or without gloves) all the time you are outside your house.

Keeping your hands clean:

Keeping your hands clean is the most important measure in containing the spread of the virus. It is recommended that you wash your hands carefully and continuously either with soap and water or with an alcoholic antiseptic, especially after contact with publically used surfaces, as you leave the place you have just visited and as you enter your own personal areas, such as your car or your house. In parallel to this, you have to avoid at all times touching your face with your hands and if you have to do this, it must be done with clean hands.

Gloves:

Even though the use of gloves is recommended by many working places, with a view to prevent the spread of the virus SARS-CoV-2, keeping your hands clean before and after the use of gloves is imperative. In such cases, it is recommended that the gloves must be used immediately before entering public places and must be thrown away in a dustbin immediately after leaving a public place, where you have to follow the instructions about keeping your hands clean.

It is not recommended to use gloves all the time while you are outside your house, because this creates a false sense of security and it increases the danger of non-compliance with the rest and the most important measures.

Moreover, it must be noted that gloves are easily worn out, both while you are using them as well as from alcoholic solutions. If gloves are damaged or are used for prolonged periods of time, they must be properly disposed of and hands must be cleaned properly and if need be, use a new pair of gloves.

Mask:

Even though there is no recent and no accurate scientific data advocating the use of a mask in public places (places where health care is not available), the use of a mask aims at restricting the spread of discharge of the respiratory system by the person who is wearing the mask. Consequently, the mask can limit the spread of the virus to other people from symptomatic patients and or asymptomatic persons who are wearing a mask. It can also protect those wearing the mask from exposing directly their mouth and their nose to particles from other persons who are very close to them.

The use of a mask however is running the risk of creating a false sense of security. It must be pointed out that even when being used, the mask is an additional measure of protection. For this reason, all the remaining measures must be applied, such as keeping your hands clean, keeping a distance of 2 metres from other people and restricting – isolating positive cases and their contacts. As the mask can be damaged, it must be disposed of in dustbins after using it for some hours, when it is visibly dirty or wet, or as you leave closed areas where a mask was used.

The use of self-made cloth masks does not protect; on the contrary it exposes the user to danger. Furthermore, the use of a mask of high respiratory protection or a face shield in a community, provides absolutely no benefit, because the conditions which produce aerosol effect do not exist, as this happens in areas where health care is provided. Consequently, if a person decides to use a mask, it is recommended to use a simple surgical mask and follow the instructions of the manufacturer.

The Unit for Epidemiological Monitoring and Control of Infectious Diseases (**PLEASE CHECK THE EXACT OFFICIAL TERM THEY USE IN ENGLISH**) and the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health stress that they are monitoring closely international bibliography and in cases of changes in existing data or instructions and measures relating to SARS-CoV-2 they will provide the Minister of Health with the relevant recommendations/modifications so that decisions will be taken and Cypriot citizens and those residing in the Republic of Cyprus will be informed in order to safeguard Public Health.

Finally, it is pointed out that the Scientific Advisory Committee makes announcements and recommendations on the basis of expertise, scientific data which is in place in other countries as well and following a study of medical bibliography.