

FACE MASKS AND DANCING

[There is no truth to the claim that a mask might reduce one's oxygen levels.](#)
[Working out with others in a room with poor ventilation is downright dangerous.](#)
[Ontario reopens schools – students required to wear masks](#)

Doctors for Dancers

- [All About Masks](#)
- [Going Back to Dance Safely – Part II](#)
- [Going Back to Dance Safely – Part I](#)

Here's What Experts Say to Look for in a Mask for Dancing

Cory Stieg (Dance Teacher Magazine)

Jul 17, 2020

From oversized mouse heads in *The Nutcracker* to Jabbawoockeez masks, most dancers have experience performing with restrictive costumes or headpieces. But as we transition from taking class at home during the COVID-19 pandemic to sharing a studio with others, masks aren't just a costume accessory: They're a necessary health tool.

While masks are not a replacement for other COVID-19 prevention measures that we've been following for months, such as social distancing and practicing hand hygiene, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people [wear face masks or cloth face coverings](#) in any public setting or instance where it's difficult to maintain at least six feet of social distance—and that includes the dance studio.

We spoke with medical experts and dancewear manufacturers about what to look for in a protective mask for dance.

Why masks are a must

COVID-19 is [mainly spread through respiratory droplets and aerosols](#) that are produced when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes. Covering your nose and mouth is one of the easiest things you can do to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and keep your fellow dancers safe, says Dr. Nita Bharti, an infectious disease expert from the Center for Infectious Disease Dynamics at Penn State University.

The point of wearing a mask is to protect other people from your own respiratory droplets, says Dr. Charlotte Baker, assistant professor of epidemiology at Virginia Tech. Everyone in the studio must wear a mask, because people can carry and spread COVID-19 without having any symptoms. "The more people wear a mask, the safer everybody gets to be," she says.

Masks are particularly important when you're indoors, because there's less airflow for respiratory droplets to disperse. If you're in an enclosed indoor dance studio, for example, your droplets will essentially be confined to that room, Bharti says. Not to mention, you tend to breathe heavier during physical exercise, which means that you're spreading even more droplets, Baker says.

Keeping your nose and mouth covered throughout a day of rehearsals and classes comes with its challenges, but it's worth it for your long-term health. "Even if you're young and healthy, this virus can do horrible things, with lasting effects that could really have a negative outcome on your dance career," Bharti says.

Find the right fabric

Ideally, your mask should be breathable so you can still exert yourself, but thick enough to stop your respiratory droplets. Baker recommends a simple fabric test: Put your mask on, hold your hand six to 10 inches from your face, and take a deep breath. If you can feel the air on your hand as you exhale, your mask isn't thick enough, she says.

Since your mask will be close to your face for prolonged periods of time, opt for natural fabrics, such as bamboo and cotton, over man-made ones like polyester, says Luis Guimarães, CEO and co-founder of dancewear company Ballet Rosa. The Ballet Rosa masks are made from a blend of bamboo and stretchy cotton, which are natural fabrics that [work well at filtering particles](#) while also allowing breathability.

Focus on fit

From a practical perspective, your mask needs to cover your nose, mouth and chin, with no gaps where respiratory droplets could easily escape, Baker says. "The biggest thing is you just want to make sure it fits your face," she says.

Of course, buns and other dance hairstyles can make mask straps awkward. Ballet Rosa offers four masks that have slightly different straps to accommodate different hair needs: one with an adjustable single strap; one with double elastics; one that loops around the ears; and one with an adjustable over-ear drawstring. The idea is that you can choose how to position the mask around your bun and keep it secure throughout your day.

These details matter, because once you have your mask on, you shouldn't fidget with it or remove it. [Touching the outside of the mask](#) can cause contamination.

Wash it well

Many fabric face masks that are intended for exercise are treated with antimicrobial agents to ward off germs from your sweat. [Bloch's B-Safe face mask](#), for example, is made from a cotton-polyester blend that's designed to control odor and keep the fabric fresh as you dance, explains Cathy Radovan, COO of Bloch. The [Under Armour Sportsmask](#), another popular pick for athletes, has an inner fabric liner that wicks away sweat and keeps bacteria from growing on the mask.

Even with these special features, it's important to [wash your mask after every use](#), or when it becomes visibly soiled. The CDC suggests machine-washing your mask with regular laundry detergent and warm water, and drying it on the highest heat setting.

Keep your mask in a plastic or paper bag when you're not using it to prevent further contamination. If you dance most days, you may want to have more than one mask so you can always have a clean mask at the ready.

Do a "dress rehearsal"

Exercising in a mask takes practice, just like everything else in dance, Baker says. It's completely safe to cover your nose and mouth with fabric while dancing or exercising, but a little discomfort is to be expected, she says.

Research suggests that masks and face coverings may increase "[breathing effort](#)" during exercise, but not to a degree that it would affect your performance, explains Dr. William O. Roberts, a family medicine and primary care sports medicine physician and professor at the University of Minnesota, who's a past

president of the American Council of Sports Medicine. "You're not going to have any problems with oxygenation, increased [CO2 retention](#) or anything like that," he says.

If you're having difficulty breathing, or if you feel short of breath while dancing, that's a sign that you need a different mask, Baker says. You might want to explore either a more breathable fabric that is still effective or an alternative fit that allows you to get more oxygen, she says. (Keep in mind that wearing a mask or face covering can be dangerous for people who have medical conditions that affect breathing, such as asthma, she says. Talk to your doctor if you're not sure what the best option is for you.)

<https://www.dance-teacher.com/workout-mask-2646425104.html?rebellitem=2#rebellitem2>

[6 Best Training Masks In 2020 \[Buying Guide\] – Gear Hungry ›](#)

[Training Mask. Just Breathe. TrainingMask.com ›](#)

[Best Face Masks For Working Out | POPSUGAR Fitness ›](#)

[18 Workout Masks for Coronavirus—Best Breathable Face Masks ›](#)

[How to exercise with a face mask -- and what not to do - CNET ›](#)

[Exercising While Wearing a Mask - The New York Times ›](#)

[Best Face Masks For Running 2020: Cloth Face Coverings for ... ›](#)

[What Can Dancers Do If They Don't Feel Safe Returning to the Studio? ›](#)

[Don't Let Your New At-Home Cross-Training Regimen End in Injury ... ›](#)

[Working Out Outside? Here's How to Plan a Safe Sweat Session ... ›](#)

How to Dance in a Face Mask

[Helen Rolfe](#) (Dance Spirit Magazine)

Jul 09, 2020

There's a new must-have accessory for the dancers who've begun to venture back into the studio. Face masks are essential to protect your teachers and fellow dancers (not to mention their families) from coronavirus. But they definitely make dancing more complicated.

How can you prepare for—and adjust to—the new masked normal? Here's practical advice from Dr. Steven Karageanes, a primary care sports medicine specialist who's worked with the Rockettes and "So You Think You Can Dance," and Anna Dreslinski Cooke, a Chicago-based professional dancer who has experience dancing in cloth masks, disposable masks, N95 masks, and face shields.

What to Expect

There's no way around it: Dancing while masked is uncomfortable, especially at first. That discomfort will vary depending on how hard you're dancing and [which mask you choose](#). Cooke recommends steering clear of the N95 style, which is restrictive (and should be reserved for frontline workers if possible). Instead, opt for a homemade cloth mask. "I knew the N95 mask would be difficult to breathe in," says Cooke. "But I'd done some indoor biking in a face mask and felt fine, so I anticipated that a homemade cotton mask would be a little bit easier."

When you start to sweat and breathe heavily—due to a warm studio, your own exertion, or both—the mask fabric will cling to your face, making your breathing feel more labored. "Especially with disposable masks, moisture from my breath would soften the fibers, so the mask would start to break down and not hold its shape anymore," says Cooke. To relieve this sweaty situation, bring a spare mask that you can swap in halfway through class or between classes.

How to Mask Better

Speaking of spares, you'll want to invest in several masks, so that you can wash them between each wearing. "The last thing you want is contact with virus that's on the surface of your mask," explains Karageanes. "Plus, sweaty masks can grow other organisms as well." Yuck!

Some good news: None of the masks that Cooke tried moved around or slipped much while she was dancing. If you do need to adjust your mask for whatever reason, try to touch only the elastic ear loops or the ties that fasten at the back of your head. "Every time you bring your hands to your face, even with your mask on, it's a risk," says Karageanes.

Speak Up While You Mask Up

If you have asthma, cystic fibrosis, or any other preexisting respiratory condition, it's essential to advocate for your own health and safety while masked. Cooke, who has mild asthma, is now making sure to hit her inhaler before each in-mask studio session: "You might think you can get through it, but safety comes first." Even if you've never had trouble breathing before, you should stop immediately if you feel faint, dizzy, or start to hyperventilate while dancing in a mask.

Your studio might have already established rules about what to do when you need this kind of break. If not, "Put up your hand, walk off to the side, and rest for a moment—preferably without removing your mask," says Karageanes. He suggests taking child's pose, kneeling on all fours, or just sitting down until

you feel better. Your teacher won't think you're weak or lazy—on the contrary, your feedback will help them set the right pace for class in this new era of dancing while masked.

Deep Breaths, Everyone

Those who cross-train on a regular basis may find dancing in a mask easier than those who aren't as well-conditioned, Karageanes says. If you're preparing to return to the studio, add more steady-state cardio to your routine now, which could help you acclimate to masked dancing.

While dancing in a face mask won't be comfortable or easy, it's also a must. "We're all going to get through this together," says Cooke. "We might even end up a little bit more fit—or at least better at dancing through it, no matter what 'it' is."

<https://www.dancespirit.com/how-to-dance-in-a-face-mask-2646373852.html?rebellitem=1#rebellitem1>