

National [Coronavirus pandemic](#)

## OPINION

# *Double masking is our secret weapon against Delta*



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Australia is being crushed by something we've not seen before: exponential growth in COVID-19 cases, even with lockdowns and mask mandates. But right under our noses – quite literally – we have an un-deployed secret weapon that is cheap, easy and effective at slowing down the spread of the virus: better masks.

I recently returned to Australia from Silicon Valley. Nearly 18 months ago, I realised that wearing masks could help flatten the curve. That lightbulb moment inspired me [to advocate for the universal adoption of mask-wearing](#). I led a scientific team that in April 2020 wrote the first and largest [evidence review](#) of masks effectiveness against the spread of COVID-19. I published an op-ed in *The Washington Post* and formed the #Masks4All movement that kick-started mask wearing in the US and globally. High-quality masks were not available then. So, we focused on studying cloth masks, which people could make themselves.



How we wear masks can dramatically affect their efficacy. WAYNE TAYLOR

Now, due to the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant, last year's masks are no longer up to the task. It's time to up our game again.

[Recent research](#) has shown that simply wearing a tight-fitting cloth mask over your surgical mask, known as "[double masking](#)", reduces exposure by more than 10 times compared with using a cloth or surgical mask alone.

Another simple yet equally effective change is to wear a single surgical mask, but to [knot and tuck](#) the sides. This takes around a minute and can be done at home with no tools.

Double-masking and knot-and-tuck both help to seal the side gap in surgical masks that otherwise allows virus particles direct access to your lungs. COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through aerosolized respiratory particles that can be inhaled through air that travels through the side gaps. Bending the nose wire in your mask also delivers a better seal.

Today, there are better, cheaper and more effective mask options on the market. For instance, KF94 and P2 masks are the Korean and Australian standards, both providing a much better fit than surgical masks because they do not have a gap at the sides. KF94 masks are widely available internationally, and there is local capacity to manufacture P2 masks. But they can be hard for consumers to find because few companies are importing or making them in Australia. A major government or industry initiative is needed to get an ample supply of better masks here, and to encourage citizens to adopt them.

But don't wait for the government to roll out better masks. Visit <https://masks4all.co/faqs-on-better-masks/> for illustrations of how to knot and tuck or double up to make the masks you have now more effective.

**Jeremy Howard is a Distinguished Research Scientist at the University of San Francisco and co-founder of fast.ai and #Masks4All**

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