

PRINT-Seeing the Best Choice in Preventing Spread of COVID-19

Model Naomi Campbell recently talked about how she wears goggles while travelling on airplanes because you can catch COVID-19 through your eyes.

Technically, she is correct according to Lori Grooms, OSF HealthCare director of Infection Control and Prevention.

“Eyes are a mucus membrane like your nose and your mouth so they are a moist tissue which virus can enter the body through. But, the highest risk for acquiring it (COVID-19) through the eyes is in a health care setting,” Grooms explains.

Grooms says health care workers perform tasks that can cause aerosolized droplets which have a potential to penetrate the eyes.

“Testing procedures, some of our medications that we give; nebulizers and some of the things we do to patients to take care of them, so ventilators, things such as that increase the risk of the amount of aerosols that are being expelled.”

The pathway from the eyes into the respiratory system is far less direct than through the nose and mouth, according to Grooms. To become infected through your eyes, the virus would have to penetrate the mucous membrane in the eye, be washed by tears behind your cheeks into your nasal cavity, and then flow from the nose into your throat.

Ophthalmologists also suggest eyes have a number of defense mechanisms that help protect against infection, like eyelids that blink to cover the eye and tears that contain immunoglobulins that fight invaders.

But, the country’s most trusted COVID-19 expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, made headlines last July when he suggested, “If you have goggles or an eye shield, you should use it.” Grooms concedes that combined with a mask, adding goggles or a properly worn face shield would offer the most coverage. She suggests even eyeglasses offer some protection from transfer of the virus from high touch surfaces.

“What we really want to prevent is you touching your eyes. So, if you wear glasses or if you wear sunglasses, you’re less likely to touch and rub your eyes than if you did not have them on.”

For the average person, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not recommend wearing goggles or other eye coverings. However, those who might be at higher risk for severe complications from COVID-19 might consider wearing additional protection in high-risk situations such as a location where they can’t remain physically distanced, which could include an airplane or public transportation.

The best advice remains what we’ve heard for months – keep your distance, wear your mask, and wash your hands.

For the general population who opts to wear face shields or goggles, Grooms emphasizes they should also be kept clean, just like your [mask](#).

The CDC also recommends:

- Choose a face shield that wraps around the sides of your face and extends below your chin or a hooded face shield.
- [Wash your hands](#) after removing the face shield or goggles. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing them.
- Clean and disinfect reusable face shields and goggles according to the manufacturer’s instructions or by following [CDC face shield cleaning instructions](#). If you use a disposable face shield, wear it once and throw it away according to the manufacturer’s instructions.