



# How designer face masks are becoming the new fashion statement

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As the coronavirus pandemic becomes part of everyday life, face masks are becoming the new must-have fashion item, going from small accessory to big business. Masks have proven to be one of the most affordable and effective tools for containing the spread of Covid-19. Overall, 63% of people in the country wear masks, but only 54% do so in Dhaka division, according to a survey by researchers. "The government has been trying to promote wearing masks to slow down the spread of coronavirus in Bangladesh for about four months. The number of people that have started wearing masks outdoors in this short period is a collaborative achievement for the health sector, policymakers, and the citizens of Bangladesh who are following the health guidelines," said Dr Ayesha Akhter, Spokesperson of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Most of us would probably ask how well a mask, especially a one made from cloth, may protect us from Covid-19. But the notion of "personal protection" misses the major reason why calls for increased use of masks and face-coverings have gained momentum around the world. "We are not defenceless against COVID-19," said Dr Robert R. Redfield, the director of the Centers for Disease Control in the United States. "Cloth face coverings are one of the most powerful weapons we have to slow and stop the spread of the virus—particularly when used universally within a community

setting. Everyone has a responsibility to protect themselves, their families, and their communities."

## Who is making them?

While face masks began to surface as protective gear, their designer counterparts are more than that — they are as much about the visual statement. People are opting for fashionable masks, and the businesses of Bangladesh have already jumped on the bandwagon with designing trendy masks.

"As we embrace the 'new normal' living in the times of COVID-19, Broque intends to do right by the needs of the people and the environment, using its #mask4mask campaign. The campaign aims to provide quality recycled masks for marginalized communities, which in turn reduces the use of disposable masks by the mass consumers," said Mahenaz Chowdhury, Owner of Broque. Broque designer masks are made of cotton and are reusable, with the added artistic flair. Through this movement, Broque is seeking to reduce wastage and littering of single-use masks and promote consumers to take action against climate change. For every mask sold, there is a mask that is donated for a cause. As a part of the #mask4mask campaign, Broque has partnered up with an NGO to donate part of their proceeds to the flood victims.

Another take on the ordinary masks is denim. Home & Health essentials have taken on the task of making customizable

denim masks. "Our masks are not for front liners, since there are non-medical masks but the responses we get from our young clients are amazing as they found comfort in our products", they stated. While Salmira Rahman Couture sells lace masks which mainly serves as a fashion accessory, they have made sure the users feel the luxury. It is suggested to wear their mask on top of a surgical mask for protection against the virus. "Our masks are gorgeous yet comfortable, serving up a fashionable look. The masks have a silk lining which makes it extremely comfortable" responded the team.

For anyone looking to express their artistic side while still playing safe, Maskyou has come up with exceptional designs. From local love, artistic, paintings to even colourful masks for the kids, this business makes them all. "Our customers love a matching look. Having a mask that matches their top makes the mask more fun and whimsical to wear. It comes with 4 layers of protection to ensure maximum protection against germs, respiratory droplets and dust particles. Printed in a hi-end automated machine using non-toxic inks for breathing safety. Besides, the last layer of the mask has a pocket to insert PM 2.5 activated carbon (melt-blown replaceable filter) to enable extra safety," said Maskyou representatives.

## Why should we buy them?

The most common question that pops up in our mind when we hear "fashionable

masks" is whether they actually help protect us against the virus. If the masks are made according to safety protocols, then it would be a sustainable and promising alternative.

"Unlike the other masks, these masks don't make my face sweat, nor do I face any breathing difficulties wearing them. Also, they're very comfortable to wear" said Fariat Siddiqui, a student at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), frequently having to travel during the pandemic. Zaria Amreen, the eldest daughter in her family responded, "Kids nowadays don't like to wear masks unless they enjoy it. These printed and colourful masks have made my siblings' lives easier and safer." What we can deduce from the users' statement is that these cloth masks are made of more breathable material and help encourage people of all ages to wear them as a fashion piece rather than a shield against the COVID-19 virus.

It looks like we are going to be wearing cloth face masks for a while, which is all the more reason to find one that you like. but wearing a fabric mask as a civilian is quite reasonable, provided you can afford and access one. So for the foreseeable future, we will be wearing masks to the grocery store, on walks and runs, and maybe even after the crisis abates. Given the prevalence of mask selfies, it is highly likely that masks will start to become fashion accessories, rather than merely functional.