

How to **AVOID SINGLE-USE PLASTICS** during the pandemic

What's the problem?

There has been a huge increase in the use of disposable items during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially single-use plastics, which is having a major environmental impact.

Plastic is a significant contributor to climate change, as it generates greenhouse gas emissions at every stage of its lifecycle.

Plastic waste has an enormously detrimental effect on our rivers, oceans and wildlife. It can choke or smother fish, dolphins, seabirds and seals. No square mile of surface ocean anywhere on earth is free of plastic pollution. It takes hundreds of years to break down, and the effects of microplastics on ecosystems are only just beginning to be understood.

“Covid will eventually go away, plastic waste won't, it's here forever.” *Dr Christian Dunn, Bangor University*

Isn't plastic essential to protect us from the virus?

Items made of single-use plastic have undoubtedly been important in the fight against Covid-19, especially for protective equipment for frontline health and care workers.

However, in non-clinical settings, there is no evidence that disposable plastic versions of products such as gloves, facemasks or food and drink packaging give any greater protection against coronavirus than reusable equivalents.

What can we do?

There are a wide range of alternatives to using disposable single-use plastic items – see opposite. To protect health and reduce the risk of transmission of the virus, good hygiene practices and risk management measures also continue to be vital.

“As a body of people committed to caring for God's creation, our intent is to reduce our carbon footprint, improve recycling, minimise waste and improve efficiencies on finite natural resources in all of our operations.” *URC Environmental Policy*

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Facemasks: The government recommends reusable face coverings to the general public. Research by consumer group Which? found that well-fitting two- or three-layer fabric masks are just as effective at filtering out bacterial particles as single-use surgical masks. It recommends: **NEQI Reusable Face Masks**, £15 for three, available from Boots and Ocado, and **Bags of Ethics Great British Designers Face Coverings**, £15 for three, available at John Lewis, Boots, Sainsbury's, Argos and Waitrose.

If half of the UK's population used one disposable mask a day for a year, it would create more than 30,000 tonnes of contaminated plastic waste. *UCL*

Gloves: According to Which?, disposable surgical gloves are not generally needed for the general public: “Gloves are just as likely to become contaminated when out and about, so instead of throwing away a pair of gloves each time you go out, washing your hands or using sanitiser are better options. Wearing gloves may also give the false impression of hand hygiene, while forgetting to change your gloves would be just as bad as forgetting to wash your hands.”

Reusable cups, food containers, & shopping bags: In June 2020, a study by health experts concluded that during the pandemic “reusable systems can be used safely by employing basic hygiene”.

Disposable cups and plates: There are various alternatives to plastic cups and tableware, such as compostable plant-based **Vegware** vegware.com and **'I'm a Green Cup' Bio Cups** from simplyecopackaging.co.uk and other suppliers.

Cleaning: Current government advice is that there is no need to use additional personal protective equipment, special antibacterial wipes or other disposable products when cleaning in non-healthcare settings during the pandemic. The recommendation is to clean and launder more often, using standard products. Eco-friendly cleaning products in refillable containers are becoming available in many places.

