



Promoting Face Masks Use in Delta Variant Wave of COVID-19 and Tackling Common Reasons of Refusal to Wear Masks

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To the editor,

In this current situation of the global pandemic of COVID-19, World Health Organization (WHO) advises using masks as a protective and control measure to limit the spread of the virus. The Delta variant is spreading very rapidly among vaccinated and unvaccinated people alike and causing a significant strain on healthcare systems around the world. Severity of new delta variant is more alarming and spread is very fast. Rapid infectivity makes controlling and reducing infection rates harder. The only way of avoiding infection is social distancing and strict use of masks. Studies show the effectiveness of masks in preventing the penetration of droplets¹.

However, there are some side effects of using a mask that have been bothering people to the extent that they are refusing to use them. The aim of this communication is to highlight that if individuals face some undesirable effects due to mask, instead of avoiding its use, they should consult their health care providers so adequate measures can be taken by physicians to lessen the undesirable effects and to guide local population properly so they can keep on continuing to use masks.

Masks have a great psychological positive reinforcing effect. Greenhalgh et al² show that wearing a mask makes people comply with other protective measures providing them satisfaction and a sense of security.

Common side effects have been highlighted by some studies. Studies have been conducted on high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA), and N95 respirator masks showed that wearing masks for more than 4 hours can cause elevated carbon dioxide concentration, and may cause hyperventilation³. Another study showed an increase in breathing efforts of healthy patients who wore gas masks⁴. If N95 mask cause such effects in selected individuals, these effects can be minimized by wearing surgical face masks. Mask-related skin disorders and acne are also observed⁵. Zuo et al⁵ also showed that healthcare workers, due to their very prolonged use of masks (without taking it off for many hours) faced some minor effects like facial indentation, redness or erythema, or dry or scaling skin. The aim of highlighting these issues is that physicians should be aware of them so they can address them properly when individual complains of them and guide them.

Masks play most important role in preventing the spread of COVID-19, and their use is now more necessary than ever before amidst the pandemic. Further guidelines should be issued for common people and health care workers about the duration of using a single mask (to decrease skin irritation), avoid touching masks and use of goggles, and face shields. Secondly, the strong urge to touch eyes is created when exhaled air gets into the eyes which can result in self-infection; the use of goggles should also be promoted along with masks. This can also be prevented by proper fitting of masks so air don't rush into eyes.

The loose open ends of the mask also provide the passage for transmission of the virus, and people should wear proper sizes suited for their face. The efficacy of N95 respirators decreases if a proper fitting is not ensured.

And lastly, problems of acne can be managed by using anti-acne medicated soaps and lotions as well as by avoiding excessive reuse of spoiled masks. In the current pandemic situation, the benefits of using masks outweigh their undesirable effects.

Wearing masks can save person from COVID-19 and other diseases transmitted via respiratory droplets. Instead of refusing to wear masks, one must contact their health care providers to find a possible solution to their problem.

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