



Face Masks and the SARS CoV-2: Is It Time to Un-Mask?

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ABSTRACT

Many preventive measures were implemented: in almost every country globally, including the mandatory use of face masks in public places to prevent the transmission of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS CoV-2), the virus responsible for coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19). Face mask use was mandatory in the peaks of COVID-19 throughout the previous two years. The severity of SARS CoV-2 decreased as seen in the latest wave of the variant of concern (omicron), possibly due to the mass immunization against the SARS CoV-2. Therefore, many countries relax the preventive rules, as implemented during the pandemic, including the mandatory use of face masks in public places. However, multiple studies show the beneficial effects of face masks in droplets and airborne transmission of diseases. Therefore, it is worthy opting: for face mask use even if it is optional in closed public places with poor or not all ventilation where keeping distance is impossible.

Keywords: Face mask; Un-masking; SARS CoV-2; COVID-19

DESCRIPTION

The emergence of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19); was first reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province, in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) on January 12, 2020, named the virus "Novel Coronavirus 2019 (2019-nCoV)," which can cause an acute respiratory disease [1,2]. Later it was identified as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS CoV-2), the underlying agent for the COVID-19. On March 11, 2020, the WHO labeled the disease a global pandemic.

One of the preventive measures; recommended by WHO to reduce transmission of SARS CoV-2; is the use of face masks in public places to save lives [3]. As part of a comprehensive, do it all approach, wearing well-fitted masks should be used, including other preventive measures such as; maintaining physical distancing, avoiding crowded, closed, and close-contact settings, ensuring good ventilation of indoor spaces, cleaning hands regularly, and covering sneezes and coughs with a tissue or bent elbow. WHO recommends different types of face masks: each with its pros and cons, that include; reusable non-medical masks, disposable medical masks, and homemade multiplayer masks are an acceptable option; in cases, other options are not available.

The recently published literature on face mask use shows conflicting results. However, many studies show the pros over cons of face masks in limiting the SARS CoV-2 transmission in the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19. The research of Mitze shows the record of new cases of SARS CoV-2 infection in those using face masks [4]. The narrative review of Howard shows that the evidence: is in favor of widespread mask use as source control to reduce community transmission [5]. The study of Reyes shows a reduction in volume and travel distance of airborne viral pathogen like SARS CoV-2 by any face-covering compared to wearing no masks [6]. Some studies show the poor compliance of public to face masks use [7].

CONCLUSION

Due to the low severity of infection, in the recently faded wave of the variant of concern (omicron), possibly due to low antigenicity and mass immunizations, many jurisdictions ease restrictions regarding the preventive measures, including the mandatory use of face masks in open public places; however, it is still in place in closed settings.

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The question arises; is it time to unmask?

The answer could be both Yes and No: Yes to unmask the sense that not only the fatigue syndrome makes it hard for the public comply, but the herd immunity against severe acute respiratory syndrome and COV-2 make the chance of infection or severe illness less likely. On the other hand, the use of face masks is still beneficial in terms of minimizing the transmission of different droplets and airborne diseases, which has benefits both for the wearer and public. Personally: I feel that using face masks should be part of healthy habits and should be opted even if it is optional in closed, poorly, or un-ventilated public places once the pandemic is over.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

L.A.K acquired the idea; wrote and prepared the draft.

A.Q.A reviewed and approved the final draft.

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