

Wearing a mask against the Covid-19: a mandatory and non random gesture

Press release from the French National Academy of Medicine

July 15, 2020

On numerous occasions (March 23, April 2, April 22, May 7, May 23), the French National Academy of Medicine recalled the importance of wearing masks as part of barrier measures, along with physical distancing and hand hygiene, to prevent the transmission of SARS-CoV-2. Indeed, the wearing of a "screen" or "general public" mask is the most effective measure to eliminate the transmission of the virus from person to person, provided that it is applied by all in the public space.

The government's decision to make it mandatory to wear masks when leaving the containment as from 11 May 2020 has made it possible to use land-based public transport, to resume some air transport and restart several economic activities. In the absence of effective antiviral treatment and available vaccine, only the strict application of barrier measures, in particular the wearing of masks by the whole population, allows the essential resumption of social and economic life to be considered as long as the risk of epidemic resurgence remains.

Indeed, in addition to the epidemic situation that remains worrying in French Guyana and Mayotte, the circulation of the virus is causing serious concern in metropolitan France with a rise in the R0 reproduction rate above value 1, especially in the department of Mayenne where the alert threshold has been exceeded. At the same time, the tendency to relax in the compliance with barrier measures, observed since the release of the containment, tends to worsen with the summer season, especially among certain sections of the population who, because of their young age, consider themselves to be at low risk.

Recent studies, some revealing that "the" asymptomatic virus carriers are potential contaminators, others showing that the transmission of the virus by aerosolized salivary particles is possible in closed environments, confirm the preponderance of mask use among the barrier measures, especially in confined, low-ventilated spaces.

In line with the government's decision to extend the requirement to wear masks in enclosed areas, the National Academy of Medicine recommends:

- to implement an extensive information campaign reminding us that the wearing of the "mainstream" mask is an altruistic gesture intended to protect those around us and that, for this reason, it is not optional;
- to maintain control over the mandatory wearing of masks on land and air public transport;
- to introduce the obligation to wear masks in enclosed and covered places open to the public as defined in the regulatory text on the prevention of passive smoking (shops, restaurants, hotels), as well as in workplaces where physical distance can hardly be respected.