

The proper use of masks

Press release from the French National Academy of Medicine
September 7, 2020

The persistent circulation of SARS-CoV-2 and the progression of the Covid-19 epidemic observed in France during the summer led to make the wearing of masks compulsory in all enclosed places from July 20, then to extend this obligation in an outdoor environment in many municipalities and large cities during the month of August.

It should be remembered that the compulsory wearing of a "general public" or "alternative" mask had been recommended on April 2 by the National Academy of Medicine to strengthen barrier measures during the containment period and in the following phase [1].

Initially misunderstood in its altruistic meaning and refuted due to the dearth of medical masks, then criticized for the alleged dangers of misuse, made more complex by the accumulation of unjustified standards and excessive precautions, this simple common sense measure was ultimately vilified on the fallacious pretext of the lack of scientific publications attesting its efficiency. A plethora of often contradictory statements maintains the general confusion and feeds the discourse of the scorners of the obligatory mask, the most extreme not hesitating to denounce its liberticidal nature.

Wearing a mask in the community is not optional; masking oneself to protect others is an altruistic gesture whose collective effectiveness is certain when applied by everyone ; it brings together all citizens in the global response to the pandemic [2].

If the alternative masks have slightly lower performance than the surgical masks in terms of filtration and sealing, they generally offer better comfort and "breathability".

The current epidemiological indicators predicting a prolonged epidemic situation, it becomes necessary to integrate the wearing of the mask in the daily gestures by making it understandable, acceptable and routinely.

This is why **the National Academy of Medicine recalls that:**

1. disposable paper masks, known as "surgical", should be used preferentially during care activities and systematically for sick people or people in care isolation;
2. in public spaces, washable cloth masks should be preferred to disposable masks for obvious economic and ecological reasons:
 - they can be washed by hand or in the washing machine, with a detergent, such as body linen, the temperature of 60 ° C being no more justified for the washing of masks than for hand washing;
 - they should be changed when they get wet and never be worn more than one day;
 - they are reusable after each washing-drying cycle as long as their qualities (fabric mesh and straps integrity) are not altered.

In addition, **the Academy of Medicine recommends:**

- that the obligation to wear a mask, systematically associated with distancing measures, should be implemented in all public places, closed and open, according to rules easy to understand, apply and control;
- that clear and simplified information on the use of masks be widely disseminated.

[1] Press release from the National Academy of Medicine "Covid-19 pandemic: enhanced barrier measures during containment and in the ex-containment phase", April 2, 2020.

[2] Cheng KK, Lam TH, Leung CC. Wearing face masks in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic: altruism and solidarity. Lancet 2020 ; S0140-6736 (20) 30918-1.