Long term effects of wearing masks

By Joselito N. Villero May 16, 2020 Updated May 18, 2020

Annabel Limentang, a clinical laboratory scientist and director of laboratory services at Pioneers Memorial Healthcare District in Brawley, wears a mask during her days off and at work.

JOSELITO N. VILLERO PHOTO

EL CENTRO — Face masks became a part of a person's daily wardrobe when the lockdown began in March of this year up to the present.

The time of continued use varies for each individual. Some use it while shopping for groceries, while others need to wear it at their place of employment — especially those working in clinics and hospitals.

Dr. Tien Vo, CEO of Vo Medical Center in El Centro and Calexico, said he does not have a scientific basis to support his comments on the long-term use of masks. "I use common sense and my experience."

Maria Peinado, the public health information officer at Imperial County Public Health department, also said there was no information available on the side effects of wearing masks.

According to Peinado, wearing a mask affects breathing. "For an elderly person to wear a mask, that person should be able to remove the mask by him or herself," said Peinado. For more information, she recommended www.cdc.gov.

"The person exhales and inhales the same air that the lungs are trying to expel — but the air stays in the mask," said Dr. Vo. The lungs are trying to get rid of toxins. For normal healthy individuals, that is not problem. He said it would be good to take a break by removing the mask in a safe area.

Masks — depending on the materials used — may cause allergies, itchiness, and redness on the skin. In due time, custom cloth masks eventually accumulate sweat, makeup and beauty products, automotive exhaust, pollen, and any particles floating in the air.

"Wash the reusable masks to prevent further infection which may later spread to family members," said Dr. Vo.

Annabel Limentang is a clinical laboratory scientist and director of laboratory services at Pioneers Memorial Healthcare District in Brawley. She is used to wearing masks during her shift. She uses N95 and other medical masks at work and custom cloth masks on her days off. The N95 mask is fitted and encloses both nose and mouth. In effect, the wearer inhales her own exhaled air.

Wearing a mask is a necessary inconvenience and affects makeup in the facial area, according to Limentang. "Most women don't like it because it smears the makeup foundation," said Limentang. As a result, beauty products were usually only applied surrounding the eye area — the visible area of the face with the mask on.

"Makeup is applied to increase confidence by looking good," said Limentang.

At the end of the day, the area behind the ear becomes irritated. As a result, most wearers add extenders to loosen the tight fit.

According to Limentang, one inconvenience: a cell phone with facial recognition cannot recognize the masked face and prevents the owner from using her own cell phone.

"It is the material," said Leticia Romo, a nurse who works at a general hospital in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico. "My skin is sensitive, and I get itchy."

At her place of work, Romo puts on a new mask each time she visits a patient and disposing of the old one to prevent infecting other patients. "I'm used to wearing masks during my shift."

According to Romo, she wears a different mask going home. Even then, she still experiences itchiness. Romo washes her face and applies almond oil. This routine has given her relief from the itchiness.

Wearing a face mask is a daily routine for Amanda Gomez, a friend of Romo. The friends were at Best Buy shopping. "This is everyday life. I'm used to it." Because of a health condition, she is used to social distancing and wearing masks.

"And now, people around me are doing what I've been doing."

The temperature was in the upper 80s as Jay Mendez walked briskly towards his car after shopping at Walmart in El Centro.

"The mask makes it harder to breathe because I have asthma and bronchitis," said Mendez, a student at Imperial Valley College majoring in automotive engineering.

"I shaved my mustache, but I kept my beard," Mendez said. According to him, he wears a mask whenever he goes to the stores for safety and to show respect for others. The mask, made by his aunt, was made of black material which looks masculine, according to Mendez.

"Wearing a mask is nuisance, but, not really," Mendez said.

Tags: Face Mask, Masks, Clothing, Imperial County Public Health Department, Beauty Products, Nurse, Asthma, Bronchitis, Almond Oil, Itchiness

Joselito Villero
Reporter

Follow Joselito Villero

thedesertreview.com
110 South Plaza
Brawley, CA 92227
Phone: 760-351-0100
Email: editor@thedesertreview.com

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