

Mask as an aid in preventing photodermatosis

COVID-19 pandemic does not look it is going to end soon; the population is adapting and acclimatising to this new normal. In order to prevent the spread of virus, people are changing their daily habits, which include frequent washing of hands and wearing a mask.

Masks are covering almost lower two-thirds of the face providing photoprotection to the nose, cheeks, lips, and perioral and mandibular regions. Masks are made of tightly woven fibres, which favour photoprotection. The combination of these masks and sunglasses covers almost the entirety of face. In this era of COVID-19 when everyone is donning a mask, patients with these disorders are becoming more confident in wearing them. The social stigma attached in looking different is becoming less and hence the compliance has increased many folds.

This is turning out to be a blessing in disguise for patients with lupus erythematosus and other connective tissue disorders like dermatomyositis.

The risk of basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinomas will be further decreasing. This photoprotection¹ provided by the mask is providing additional shield to patients with disorders like polymorphic light eruptions, actinic prurigo, hydroa vacciniforme, solar urticaria and chronic actinic dermatitis.

Genodermatoses like xeroderma pigmentosum also require strict photoprotection, and wearing of masks has added to their usual photoprotective measures.

For general population also, masks are aiding in slowing down photoaging and preventing dryness, coarsening, laxity, deep wrinkling, dyspigmentation, premalignant and malignant lesions.

This practice of wearing masks coupled with further photoprotection can be used by dermatologists too. Dermatologists after properly screening the patients² for corona virus can advise the patients to undergo procedures like chemical peeling and laser procedures which otherwise require strict photoprotection, as now the mask will be providing the additional photoprotection.

Unfortunately in some, masks may induce certain skin conditions. Since masks can be made from different materials such as polypropylene, cotton, silk, chiffon, they may cause contact dermatitis in some patients. In this case, an easy solution is to change the material of the mask. Wearing them tightly and for extended durations can cause occlusive acne. This can be prevented by periodically taking off the mask and cleaning the area with a gentle cleanser to prevent blockage of pores.

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