

Risk-Benefit (Ratio) of Wearing Masks in the Milieu Of COVID-19. An Indian Perspective

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Introduction

The scientific and medical understanding of the COVID-19 disease is progressing speedily and a number of investigational new drugs (IND) or repurposed drugs underwent clinical trial for efficacy and safety analysis [1]. Despite the expedited regulatory approval or clinical trial for several antiviral compounds presently, few are in phase 2 or 3 trial successively. There are still currently no available approved therapies with proven clinical utility for COVID-19. However, the medical experts have also advised wearing a face mask which not only provides protection from the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronaviruses 2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus but also claim to eradicate it preventing transmission especially in dense population like India [1,2]. Therefore, the use and type of masks used by the community to impede COVID-19 transmission is advancing rapidly [2]. Moreover, it is important to highlight the awareness and risk-benefit ratio (RBR) analysis of wearing masks in context to COVID-19 disease. The use of facemasks to prevent respiratory infection like COVID-19 are well known whereas complex interventions are needed especially for perceived susceptibility, the pattern of masking the face, and the type of mask used [3]. Further studies are required to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented interventions. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also recommended the guidelines on mask use in the context of COVID-19 stating the advises on the use of masks as part of a comprehensive package of prevention and control measures to limit the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 [4]. It is always thought of the absurdity of the hypoxia or any associated clinical health morbidity argument from wearing the mask. Implications of recent findings of detection of COVID-19 virus from an air sample despite initial ideas about the droplet infection meriting research question on the quality and utility of the user facemask preventing the COVID-19 transmission [5,6].

Perspective

The scientific uncertainty about the usefulness of public masking is nowadays obsolete and the clinical utility of wearing masks is unanimously granted for reducing the transmission of COVID-19 [7-9]. Masks are found to be highly safe, with only minor and uncommon side effects [7,10-11]. However, some individuals should not wear masks, such as those with severely compromised respiratory systems and individuals who cannot remove or adjust their masks (children under 2 and people with severe disabilities) [12]. However, that masking alone will not be enough to stop the pandemic. Masking is most effective when combined with physical distancing, frequent handwashing, rapid testing, and coordinated contact tracing [13]. A recent report by Govt, of India, revealed that half of the Indian population does not wear the mask [14]. The ministry, Govt of India reported that of half the Indian population who wears a mask, 64 percent of them cover the mouth but not the nose, 20 percent of them wear it on the chin, two percent have the mask on the neck and only 14 percent wear it correctly covering the nose, mouth, chin and with a clip on the nose [14,15]. Wearing masks to prevent coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is not recommended for children below five years of age, even though the practice is deemed essential for adults, according to guidelines issued by the Directorate general of health services (DGHS) under the Union ministry of health and family welfare [14,15].

Conclusion

It is undeniably suitable to pay attention to wearing masks in proper forms that may be affecting diseases. Understanding of the agent-host-environment relationship is equally important whereas masks should be used as part of an inclusive policy to suppress transmission and save lives. The use of a mask alone is not sufficient to provide an adequate level of protection against COVID-19.

Governments must therefore manage public expectations and explain the requirement of mass masking through implementing its own policies and it is important for governments to emphasise on general awareness on risk benefit ratio and mask management.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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