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Title: Unrecognized Side Effects of the Face Masks: A Prospective Survey Study During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Author(s): Shamai Kurbitaeva, Keyvan Ravakhah

Affiliation: St Vincent Charity Medical Center Internal Medicine Residency

Background

SARS-CoV-2 has infected almost 60 million individuals worldwide and caused more than 1.3 million deaths. Face masks remain one of the cornerstones in slowing the spread of the infection. However, despite occasional reports of facial pressure injuries, rashes, and communication problems, the adverse effects of prolonged mask wearing have not been investigated.

Method

This is an observational survey study. A questionnaire was electronically distributed to the employees of St. Vincent Charity Medical Center in Cleveland, OH.

Results

Total of 263 people completed the survey. 94.7% reported having at least one side effect from face masks. The most common reported adverse reactions were: skin rash (45.8%), nasal congestion or dryness (44.7%), social and communication issues (42.0%), facial itching (34.0%), shortness of breath (32.6%), ear pain (28.8%), and excess facial sweating (27.7%).

Conclusion

Wearing face masks on a daily basis and for prolonged periods of time is associated with a number of side effects that affect quality of life and may also reduce compliance with face mask policies. Further research is needed to identify associated risk factors.