

# Health Illiteracy among General Populace on Face Mask Use: Vicious Factor during Pandemics

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## ABSTRACT

Since the global pandemic outbreak has been deteriorating over the current scenario with no definite treatments available the mortality rate has been elevated and the reasons divulge is because of the shorter incubation period resulting in severe atypical pneumonia. This raising disconsolate situation of corona virus and the personal risk of acquiring disease can be altered and prevented by individual protective and preventive measures. Face masks are one of the well-known public interventions as a self-protective measure. The use of face masks among public has become ubiquitous in almost all countries now. But on the same end the measures taken to create awareness about the proper use and disposal of face masks during pandemics are relatively low which can lead to the adverse effects of using preventive equipment's. In this thrash situation, the present review describes the impact of health literacy among general public on face mask use and disposal, which can tangentially affect the risk of acquiring infection.

**Key words:** COVID-19, Pandemic, Preventive precaution use, Mortality rate, Face mask, General public, Health literacy.

The pandemic of novel corona virus disease 2019; an ongoing latest threat to the global health, was initially recognized in Wuhan, China, in December, 2019 and has since spread worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Though initial investigations reported the spread of animal to human transmission, later investigations have declared the human-human transmissions as well through close contact with an infected person and even from coughing and sneezing since the virus generally spreads via airborne Zoonotic droplets.<sup>2,3</sup>

Presently, there are ongoing Randomized Clinical Trials that any potential therapy improves outcomes in both suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases. Additionally, there are no clinical trial data supporting any prophylactic therapy. More than 300 clinical treatment trials all over the globe are underway including vaccines, symptomatic treatment and oxygen therapy are the major treatment interventions for people with severe infection.<sup>4</sup> Further, from March 2020, FDA began allowing to use convalescent

plasma in patients with serious or immediately life-threatening COVID-19 infections which is also still considered experimental.<sup>5</sup> Thus, acquiring and adhering to the Universal Safety Precautions is the only preventive measure in controlling the widespread of COVID-19 across the globe in which Universal masking is one such way to reduce the transmission probability per contact in public, among other measures.<sup>6</sup> Face masks are one of the well-known public interventions as a self-protective measure and studies conclude that public mask wearing is most effective at stopping the spread of the virus when the compliance is high. In this way, the decreased transmissibility could reduce the death toll and economic impact and the cost of the intervention is also low as well.<sup>7</sup> The use of face masks among public has become ubiquitous in almost all countries. Hence, precise use of facemasks among general public is ought to be one of the essential approaches in flattening the curve.

In this situation where prevention by protective measures can be a major hope

DOI: 10.5530/ijopp.14.1.11

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to revamp this condition, the proper use of face mask states that “for any type of mask; appropriate use and disposal are essential to provide efficient protection against infection and avoid any transmission of diseases” and have provided 7 point mask management techniques.<sup>8</sup> Especially in a situation where biomedical waste disposal can pose serious risk to humans, this inappropriate disposal of face mask by general public can cause a harm and can increase the risk of community spread as it handled by sanitation workers without proper protective aids.<sup>9</sup> In this crucial time of COVID-19 the concern behind hood factors of face mask among general public are inappropriate use of face mask such as not changing it during intervals, touching the mask while wearing and removing it, reusing the single use mask can decrease the protective effect and can ultimately pose greater risk for infection. However, there is very minimum evidence that face mask use among healthy people can be beneficial; this contrast among countries implementing various ideas on face mask use could be made much more beneficial by providing proper education to general public. Other challenges faced by general public include affordability and unfamiliarity. Thus, health literacy is the only remedy via which we can improve health outcomes of public especially during epidemics and pandemics. Proper revisions about health care measures; not only for health care workers but also among the general public will substantially increase the health consequences thus improving the intensity of health forum which is a base for building our community. A preparedness plan for epidemic and pandemic situations is to be conceived by authority members in collaboration with experts of the concerned field. The preparedness plan is to be rehearsed and tested at intervals of a few years and tweaked according to the changing conditions. Even though the number of infections, deaths and recoveries depends mostly on the demographics of the patients and

the population, the proper use of masks largely helps to prevent the spread, break the chain, flatten the curve and relieve the health care system of the crippling burden of COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is important to develop a strong communication strategy to explain the population about the circumstances, criteria and reasons for decisions which will definitely pave a way for healthy discharge.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## ABBREVIATIONS

**COVID-19:** Corona Virus Disease 2019; **FDA:** Food and Drug Administration; **WHO:** World Health Organization.

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