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Newsletter: July 2020

Face Masks & Skin Reactions

The CDC and the Rhode Island Department of Health require the use of face masks in public spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it is not always pleasant to wear a mask, it serves an importance purpose, and is essential to slow the spread of the virus. As we venture out into public more, we are wearing masks more frequently and for longer periods of time. This has contributed to an increase in skin reactions, particularly to the face and ears.

Most medical and non-medical masks were made for temporary use, not for prolonged wear or reuse. This is one reason Aspire Dermatology is seeing an increase in facial skin conditions in this



area, including acne, rosacea, irritations and rashes. They are likely triggered by the increase of warmth and moisture in the occluded-mask environment, as well as more friction and contact with various mask materials. The closed environment of the masks do not allow the skin to breathe quite as well.



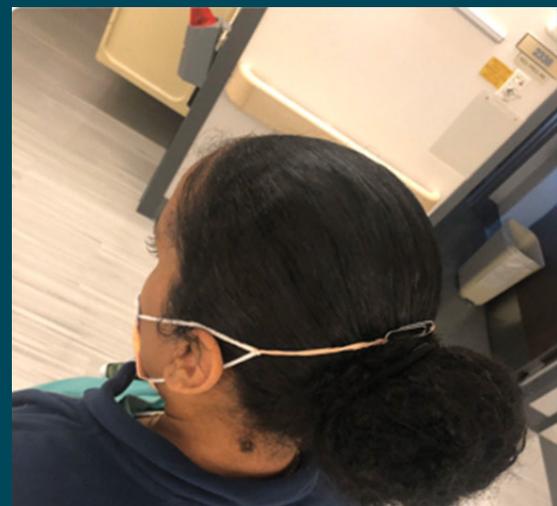
Susan Bordonaro
Dermatology Certified Nurse Practitioner

Here are some recommended tips to help manage these conditions:

FACE

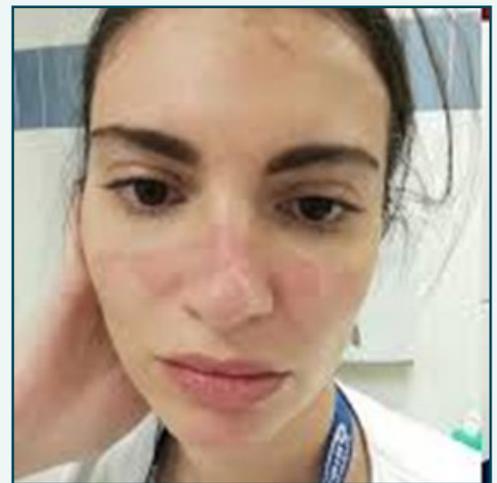
- Clean your face with a mild, fragrance free cleanser such as Cerave or Cetaphil after prolonged use of masks, and be very gentle when you wash your face by using your fingertips, not a rough washcloth.
- Limit the use of makeup and other heavy moisturizers in the mask area, unless otherwise directed by your skin care provider. Products that occlude the skin encourage acne-like conditions by clogging pores, prompting breakouts to occur. Skin care products such as retinols, tretinoin, salicylic acid, peels or scrubs can create additional irritation when occluded by masks. Their use should be minimized in these areas, too. Do not use a corticosteroid or hydrocortisone cream to the area unless instructed by your dermatologist. While they may provide temporary relief, often times they worsen the condition over time. Antibiotics may be needed to treat the condition.
- Cotton masks are often a gentler material than surgical masks, but must be washed regularly in hot water and hypoallergenic detergent to clean the impurities that get lodged in the cotton while breathing during our daily activities. Depending on your environment, reusable masks should be cleaned more frequently. If you use disposable masks, change them out more regularly.
- You should protect your *lips only* with a barrier of petroleum jelly, Aquaphor or lip balm.
- When your mask is removed to cleanse your face, light moisturizers can be used for areas of irritation from contact with the mask, but it is not recommended to use in areas of acne-prone skin.
- Proper fitting masks help to prevent rubbing and friction that can aggravate the skin. A snug fit is best. Too tight or too loose of a fit will increase the potential for skin irritations to develop. Remember, masks need to cover both your nose and mouth to be effective and prevent the spread of illness.

Some effective homemade devices that can help protect your skin



EARS

- The ears can also be affected by the improper fitting or prolonged use of the loops that go around the ears. The friction and pressure from the ear loops can even cause bruising, blistering, and open wounds. Try using a thin, silicone foam dressing that is cut to fit the ears to protect from the pressure of the loops.
- Apply a moisturizer to create a barrier against the irritation, such as one including colloidal oatmeal. If you do develop any open sores, Vaseline petroleum jelly is a nice option to keep the areas lubricated and promote faster healing.
- Using masks that minimize direct contact with the area can be very helpful. Some nice options include using tie-back masks instead of elastic ear loops, anchoring loops on buttons sewed to the side of a headband or hat or ear-saver clips that are positioned at the back of the head to hold the ear loops. People have come up with some very clever homemade devices to help prevent irritations around the ears (*see photos on previous page*).



Prolonged wearing of masks can cause a variety of skin issues.

As the course of COVID-19 is still uncertain, the use of masks will be a part of our daily lives for a while. Simple strategies can help make their use more tolerable while keeping your skin healthy. Please know that the providers at Aspire Dermatology are here to help you with any skin problems that may arise. We are happy to examine your rash and create a treatment plan that's right for you.

Please stay safe and healthy, and thank you for trusting the providers at Aspire Dermatology.

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