

Face Coverings and Skin Health



Wearing a face covering is now commonplace and is accepted as being a valuable tool in reducing the spread of Covid-19 throughout the community. The wearing of face coverings is now compulsory for most people on public transport, in shops and other enclosed public spaces. University policy has recently been updated to expand the number of areas where the wearing of face coverings is required to include most indoor spaces. Some exemptions apply see https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/news/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_756641_en.html for more details.

As people wear face coverings for longer it has been noted that for some individuals wearing coverings regularly can lead to facial skin problems which have become known colloquially as “maskne”. This usually affects the area around the mouth and chin and is caused by oil, make-up and sweat coupled with the increased humidity around this area as you breathe. This condition is more common in those who are required to wear masks for long periods of time and for those with pre-existing skin conditions but anyone can be affected. To help reduce the risk of poor skin health consider the following:

- Choose a face covering that is made of a material that is gentler on the skin, cotton is usually a good choice and is also more suitable for use in laboratory environments than synthetic face coverings. Some synthetic fabrics can cause allergies and are more likely to lead to irritation.
- Change your face covering regularly and avoid using dirty / damp masks. Using the same mask repeatedly is not recommended (single use masks must always be disposed of properly after use).
- Removing your face covering for a short time (when it’s safe to do so) will provide some relief to your skin as it will help to release moisture and allow your skin to dry out. Remember that you should always follow local procedures and policies relating to the wearing of face coverings.
- Some commercially available masks may be pre-treated with harsh chemicals such as formaldehyde to disinfect them. To help remove these chemicals you should always wash a new fabric face covering before wearing it.
- Make sure you wash fabric face coverings regularly, but remember that many laundry detergents also contain perfumes and brighteners that can also cause skin irritation, consider using a detergent designed for sensitive skin when laundering fabric face coverings.
- Ill-fitting or loose face coverings can move, worn rubbing the skin and causing irritation and microscopic areas of damage to the skin. Damaged skin can absorb dirt and grease leading to breakouts. Make sure your mask is well fitted and secure to reduce this.
- Touching your face covering can also cause it to shift which can contribute to irritation and this too should be avoided. It will also increase the risk of contaminating either your mask or your skin.
- Make sure that you use a gentle soap (or water alone) for washing your face. Strong antibacterial soaps and those with strong perfumes may cause further irritation to your skin.
- If you do suffer from poor skin health due to wearing a face covering, consider using a suitable barrier cream or moisturiser where you can. Everyone’s skin is different so choose one that works for you.
- Avoid wearing unnecessary cosmetics under your face covering as these are likely to increase the risk of blocked pores, exposure to chemicals and grease which could lead to skin irritation.