

10:05 AM

20 April 2021, Selasa  
8 Ramadhan, 1442

Rumah Bersih & Teratur, Ibadah Saat Ramadan

Selamat Menyambut Ramadan Al-Mubarak

Imsak

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Maghrib

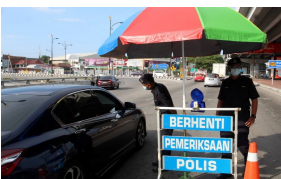
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# Face masks only a temporary protective measure



By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - July 28, 2020 @ 12:30am



The use of face masks must be complemented by behavioural changes such as social distancing. FILE PIC

IN anticipating the second wave of the coronavirus outbreak, a number of options have been proposed to mitigate, if not control the situation, other than lockdowns which were implemented during the first wave.

One favourite is the use of face masks, although some world leaders are arguably the most visible "unmasked" enthusiasts in their so-called "defence" against Covid-19, as coronavirus cases spike across their countries

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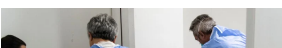
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Politics aside, science has provided a growing observation that face masks can help curb the pandemic, yet there is still scepticism in adopting them as a way of life for reasons which vary from place to place.

What seems absent from the conversation is often the mounting evidence that it basically protects other people from being infected, since it is now well-established that people can spread the coronavirus even if they are asymptomatic.

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This is said to be due to the face mask's capacity to block out infected droplets when two people are in contact. The more people wear face masks, the more people are provided similar protection.

Although not all masks are of the same make, research shows that a mask is only "useful" if properly worn, be it surgical masks or cloth masks. Both types can reduce the spread of the respiratory viruses, although the former is better in blocking infected droplets due to its "filtration efficiency".

This is fitting since they are intended for frontliners who are taking greater risks in the fight against the virus.

The ordinary cloth types are not as effective because they are not made for clinical situations. Despite this, they are considered "safe" for the general public to wear.

There is, however, evidence that wearing N95 surgical masks for long periods of time, without a break, may potentially affect oxygen levels, since they are more tightly "sealed" to the face.

It is for this reason, too, that such masks are not encouraged for general use.

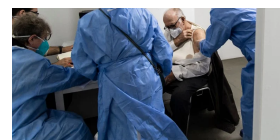
Therefore, choose a mask that is the most comfortable and gives the "best" and appropriate outcome when properly used.

If someone is having a hard time breathing through a mask, wearing a plastic face shield can also prevent incoming respiratory droplets. Nevertheless, it is still unclear how well it provides protection for the user.

That said, face masks are not a panacea but only a temporary protective measure that must be complemented by appropriate behaviour like avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated, enclosed spaces.

If one is outdoors (for example, exercising or jogging), alone or with just a few people, and adhering to proper physical distancing, there is no need to have the mask on. Care must be taken, however, not to come in contact with things such as benches or rails, or even readily-provided equipment intended for general public use.

Equally important is the issue of disposing of used masks because they are already infected with pathogens



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are already infected with pathogens.

Do not touch the dirty (exposed) surface. Handle it by the strings or loops on the side. Fold it with the dirty surface inwards, and place it in the disposal bin. Use it only once, unlike the cloth types which can be washed with soap and water or in the washing machine.

They can be air-dried, or placed in a dryer, and it is preferable to have a couple of cloth masks to facilitate the use and washing at the same time.

Whether wearing of face masks could be the ultimate universal strategy is still up for debate. Some compare this to the use of seatbelts that took years to adopt.

Today, in the case of face masks, a number of places have already achieved a higher level of adoption, for example, in South Korea, Taiwan and Japan.

It is still far from making them a "silver bullet" towards a universal strategy without embedding habits and precautions like hygiene, better testing, contact tracing and isolation of infectious people.

For now, it looks like putting on the face mask is still highly relevant and recommended come the second wave if lockdown is to be discounted, if at all.

**The writer, a 'New Straits Times' columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector**

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