

FIP Holding Statement on the use of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic (July 2020)

An FIP Holding Statement is an initial statement about an issue or issues pending further evidence and about which FIP intends to make a further statement, in these cases, with further emerging evidence. It is not a FIP Position Statement.

1 July 2020

The use of masks is part of a comprehensive package of prevention and control measures that can limit the spread of certain respiratory viral diseases, including COVID-19. Masks can be used either to protect healthy persons who may be in contact with an infected individual or for source control (worn by an infected or potentially infected individual to prevent onward transmission).

FIP's "COVID-19: Guidelines for pharmacists and the pharmacy workforce", first published in February 2020, aim to assist pharmacists and the pharmacy workforce in preventing the spread of the disease and contributing to its efficient management by healthcare systems. These guidelines include recommendations for pharmacy staff and the public on the use of masks and are updated regularly based on emerging evidence.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has published updated guidance³ on the use of masks, based on evolving evidence. It explains who should wear masks, when they should be worn and what they should be made of. In particular, the updated guidance also includes:

- Information on transmission from symptomatic, pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic infected people;
- Recommendations for the targeted continuous use of medical masks by health workers working in clinical areas;



- Advice for decision makers on the use of medical and non-medical masks by the general public using a risk-based approach.

The latest recommendations from the WHO on use of masks conclude that:

- Health workers providing direct care to COVID-19 patients, should wear a medical mask (in addition to other personal protective equipment that are part of droplet and contact precautions);
- In care settings for COVID-19 patients where aerosol-generating procedures are performed (e.g. COVID-19 intensive and semi-intensive care units), health workers should wear a respirator (N95 or FFP2 or FFP3 standard, or equivalent).

The current position of FIP is that all pharmacists and other pharmacy workforce members should wear personal protective equipment appropriate for their roles. In order to protect the public and themselves as healthcare workers, FIP recommends that those in patient-facing roles at least wear a medical mask in addition to other personal protective equipment that are part of droplet and contact precautions.

FIP is in the process of updating its COVID-19 guidance to reflect these changes. It remains critical that people who use masks continue to take other measures to protect their health, including appropriate physical distancing, hand hygiene using an alcohol-based hand rub or thorough washing with soap and water.

Reference

1. World Health Organization. Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19: Interim guidance. 5 June 2020. WHO Reference Number: WHO/2019-nCov/IPC_Masks/2020.4 Available at: <https://bit.ly/3gf00Yn>