

PRESS RELEASE:

New ASPHER Statement and Report outline recommendations on the Use of Face Masks to Combat Spread of Covid-19

- BRUSSELS, Belgium, 30 April 2020. A Statement on the Strategic Use of Face Masks was issued from The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER).
- The Statement is backed by a scientific report from ASPHER's COVID-19 Task Force and the Public Health Unit of the Catholic University of Lisbon, Portugal. The Report provides a review of the state of the knowledge on face masks and recommendations for their use during a pandemic.
- The Statement and Report can help inform governments on effective, evidence-based policies to protect their citizens. By limiting contagion, face masks, as part of a broad set of safety measures, can be a powerful ally for the safe reopening of economies.

The Statement highlights that the need for face masks to prevent the spread of viruses changes over the course of an epidemic, while different types of face masks offer different levels of protection. Governments, decision-makers and individuals must take decisions on when and what type of face mask to wear when directives are given to the population. ASPHER President, John Middleton cautioned that to assure quality of social mask use, there must be a strong public training campaign by health authorities".

The accompanying scientific report provides an in depth look at the state of the knowledge on face masks and recommendations for their use. Lead author, Henrique Lopes from the Public Health Unit of Catholic University, Lisbon warns "that masks should never be used as the only way to combat the virus, their use must be part of a broader set of safety measures, including hand-washing and physical distancing". Major findings from the report are summarized in the infographic reproduced below.

Many European countries are currently debating whether or not to require their populations to use face masks in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. ASPHER's

conclusions are based on findings from the ASPHER Covid-19 Task Force and the Public Health Unit of Catholic University, Lisbon on the need for and appropriate use and distribution of masks. The conclusions are based on public health concerns including epidemiology; clinical, social, psychological, political and behavioural sciences; ethics and economics.

The ASPHER Statement on the Strategic Use of Masks and links to the report and infographic are available here:

<https://www.aspher.org/aspher-statement-masks.html>.

Tags: COVID-19, face masks, public health

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Notes to Editors

The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) is the key independent European organisation dedicated to strengthening the role of public health by improving education and training of public health professionals for both practice and research. ASPHER's Membership is made up of more than 100 Schools and Programmes of Public Health from over 40 countries in Europe. ASPHER does not receive support from any industrial or pharmaceutical business.

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MANAGEMENT AND USE OF MASKS



NON-PHARMACEUTICAL MEASURES (NPM)

The use of masks is not a panacea to prevent viral transmission during an epidemic. It only makes sense as one element alongside other NPMs (personal hygiene, physical distancing, and so on).

MASKS' PROTECTION

The use of mask should be centered on its physical properties. For this reason, there are professional masks for health care professionals and other groups that need them, and there are social masks for the general population.

By using masks every individual is protecting others while protecting himself.



SOCIAL MASKS

A social mask is one that is made out of fabric, either produced by the industry or home-made (DIY), according to established rules. These masks have two functions:

- 1 - Diminish and mitigate contagion chains in the asymptomatic phase.
- 2 - To reserve professional masks and other personal protective equipment for the groups that need it the most.

PUBLIC TRAINING PROGRAMMES

To implement the widespread use of masks it is necessary that strong public training programmes are also provided for the population.

Clear instructions (production, use and disposal) on the masks' technical requirements must be respected and made available to everyone.



SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS AND MASKS

Decisions on the widespread use of masks must consider the socio-cultural aspects (e.g. personal image, religion, human rights, etc.) in each country and culture.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Personal Protective Equipment became an element of potential geopolitical interest and national security. It is important to reinforce countries' capacities (manufacturing, production scalability, storage and distribution, etc.) to safeguard these materials, including masks.



PROTOCOL FOR THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND USE OF MASKS - IMPLEMENTATION

HIERARCHY OF ACCESS TO MASKS

Priority of access to the highest efficacy masks should be given according to the degree of risk of exposure to oneself and other contacts.



PROTOCOL APPLICATION DURING THE EPIDEMIC CURVE

The need and function of masks differs at various phases of the epidemic.

