What to know about asthma and masks during COVID-19[1]

Wearing a face covering is one of the most effective ways to fight the spread of COVID-19, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In order to avoid contracting the coronavirus, the CDC, national lung organizations, and asthma doctors across the country agree that it's especially important for people with asthma and other lung diseases to wear a mask or face covering, stay 6 feet away from people who don't live with them, and frequently wash their hands.

Here are answers to common questions about people with asthma wearing a mask:

1. **Are masks safe for people with asthma?**
   a. The CDC, World Health Organization, asthma doctors and other national health organizations recommend that people with asthma wear a mask when they can't keep a safe distance from other people. They also agree that masks are safe for people with controlled asthma.
2. **What kind of mask should I wear?**
   a. A loose-fitting, traditional cloth mask or surgical mask are the best choices.
   b. Make sure it's comfortable, fits your face, covers your nose and mouth, and tucks under your chin.
   c. Try different mask types if one kind is uncomfortable.
   d. Choose a latex-free mask if you have a latex allergy.
3. **What kind of mask should I avoid?**
   a. Avoid a tight-fitting mask like N-95. Ask your doctor if you need a special mask.
   b. Don't use masks with valves because air droplets can escape through the valves, potentially exposing people around you to the coronavirus.
   c. **Will my asthma symptoms worsen while wearing a mask?**
      People over age 2 with asthma 2 should be able to breathe through cloth or standard medical masks without trouble. There is enough airflow from gaps around the mask and through it that provide plenty of oxygen.
4. **What if I experience difficulty breathing while wearing a mask?**
   a. If a person with asthma has impaired breathing or other challenges while wearing a mask, it could be a sign of poorly controlled asthma. Follow your asthma management plan to control symptoms. If problems persist, contact your doctor right away.
   b. Try a different mask style to see if it is more tolerable.
   c. Talk more slowly, which can improve air flow.
   d. If you're outside and at least 6 feet away from other people, take a break from your mask, but keep it accessible.
5. **Can I wear a face shield instead of a mask?**
   a. Wearing a face shield alone doesn't limit the spread of air droplets as effectively as face coverings. Consider wearing a face shield with your mask if you cannot keep at least 6 feet away from other people.
6. **Should I wear a mask during exercise?**
   a. Exercising while wearing a mask should not trigger an asthma attack if your asthma is under control.
   b. When exercising outside, keep at least 6 feet away from others.
   c. During hot or humid weather, stay in air conditioning, or exercise outdoors early in the morning or in the evening when temperatures are lower.

7. **What can I do if my job requires wearing a mask?**
   a. You may be required to wear a mask or face covering as part of your job. If you have trouble breathing while wearing a mask, talk to your employer about other strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19. People with asthma are covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and can ask for reasonable accommodations like working from home, taking more frequent breaks, or wearing a face shield.
8. **What are some other benefits of wearing a mask?**
   a. Wearing a mask can also help block asthma triggers like common cold viruses, flu virus, cold air, pollen, and animal dander.
9. **Where can I get more information?**

   - Wisconsin Department of Health Services
   - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (link is external)
   - Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (link is external)
   - World Health Organization (link is external)

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[1] Source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services. https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/mask.htm