

UHL DEPARTMENT OF DERMATOLOGY

HELPING PREVENT FACIAL SKIN DAMAGE BENEATH PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Skin irritation under PPE masks is very common and usually due to the irritating effects of moisture (sweat) and friction.

Prevention

- Ensure you have been correctly fitted for the equipment that you are asked to use.
- Always follow current guidelines for putting on and removing PPE.
- Keep your skin clean and well hydrated or moisturised: apply creams at least 30 minutes before applying PPE to ensure they sink in and do not damage the material of the mask.
- Consider use of a barrier skin wipe/skin protectant such as Cavilon if you are likely to be wearing PPE for extended periods. This will not protect your skin from the effects of a mask that is too tight but may protect it from increased moisture and sweat.
- Check the barrier product does not build up residue under the mask.
- Take time to carefully fit your mask before starting a shift. Ensure all folds in your mask have been used to optimise the correct fit for you and do not over-tighten.
- If you feel your mask is digging in, move away from direct patient contact, remove the mask in the recommended way and allow the skin to recover for approximately five minutes. Replace your mask with a new one ensuring a good fit.
- Regularly inspect your skin for signs of redness/soreness.
- It is important that you take regular breaks (we recommend every two hours) from wearing a mask to relieve the pressure on the skin and reduce moisture build-up. Wipe your skin free of sweat and allow to dry for 5 minutes. Where possible, rotate in teams where FFP3 masks can be removed between clinical shifts. This will help allow the skin time to recover.
- Remember damage can occur due to both moisture (sweat in this instance) and friction if your PPE is not properly fitted or correctly tensioned.

Caution

Skin protectants and emollients containing white soft paraffin are flammable.

DO NOT smoke with them present on your skin.

Protective dressings

Dressings may compromise mask fit, but if you need to use a dressing underneath your mask to protect the skin, your dermatology or occupational health team will consider the following:

- the product should be as low profile (thin) as possible and a tapered edge
- you should ensure your mask still fits correctly; the fit test should be repeated
- ensure the skin and your mask/visor are clean and thoroughly dry before applying
- remember to remove the dressing each time the mask is removed as part of the doffing process

Barrier films

Barrier films such as Cavilon are applied as a liquid and dry to produce a thin protective barrier film. They are less likely to impair mask fitting and are inert and hypoallergenic.

Please refer to our separate information sheet on the use of Cavilon with PPE.

Managing damaged skin

If a break occurs in the skin on your face:

- inform your line manager and complete an incident report
- consider the use of an alternative to the mask, such as a hood
- consider the use of a tapered silicone foam or a thin hydrocolloid dressing to protect your skin while maintaining a complete fit of your mask
- remember to remove the dressing each time the mask is removed as part of the doffing process.
- A mild steroid cream such as hydrocortisone 1% cream applied thinly for 5 days will help reduce any inflammation

Recommended moisturisers (emollients)

Creams

- Zerobase cream
- Cetraben cream
- Diprobace cream

Thick ointments

- Hydromol ointment
- Epaderm ointment