

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Tips on the Use of Mask Extenders

Mask extenders must NOT be used with N95 respirators as they may impact the fit and seal.

With the requirement for continuous masking, the use of masks over a long period of time may put pressure on the back of the ears and cause discomfort. Because of this, many Alberta Health Services personnel have employed mask extenders, or ear savers, to relieve the contact pressure on their ears. The guidance below offers some practical suggestions and considerations if you are using or considering the use of mask extenders.

Pros and Cons of Mask Extenders

3D Printed – Multi Hook Design



- Common mask extenders are ones that have been 3D printed and generously donated by co-workers or the community.
- The multi-hooks provide a good range of adjustable lengths to fit a wide range of users.
- Drawbacks of the 3D printed versions are that they can be rigid, parts may break, they may slip down towards the neck, and the plastic can scratch your skin. The multiple hooks have also been found to get tangled in the hair or on the mask straps, which may cause self-contamination.

Injected Plastic – Multi Hook Design



- Injected plastic versions are flexible and soft and may be more comfortable.
- Thin plastic can be flimsy making it difficult to don/doff and ensure the mask is held securely.
- The clear plastic can make it easier to misplace.

Injected Plastic – “Warrior Clip”



- This design has a latch in the hooks to help secure the mask and minimize dropping.
- There are both short and long versions. Consider if the mask extender will be long enough to reach the mask straps without putting too much pressure on the mask, or short enough to provide a good mask fit.
- For a good fit, consider the circumference of your head and if the mask extender will provide enough length to go over your hair as well as any head covering you may use.

Scrub Caps / Headbands with Buttons



- Easy to use because these remain on the head when donning or doffing the mask.
- These help to manage your hair to reduce tangling with the mask or self-contamination.
- Be sure you get a good fit given your head size and the volume of your hair.
- These can be too hot for some users
- These may cover your ears and interfere with hearing.
- Be sure you clean and replace the scrub cap when required.

Mask Extenders to Avoid

- Avoid knitted styles with buttons and any style made from foam. These are more difficult to clean which means the virus may remain on the surface and increase the chances of self-contamination.
- Avoid using paperclips, bag clips, or even barrel of monkeys' pieces as there are better, more secure options.

Knitted Styles with Buttons



Foam



Donning and Doffing the Mask and Mask Extenders

A major consideration when using mask extenders is to ensure you don and doff your mask extender properly to avoid self-contamination. Properly wash your hands both before you don and before you doff your mask extender with your mask.

- When donning the mask, put your mask around your ears first to ensure a good mask fit. Once in place, add the mask extender. Try to find an angle that does not pull the mask too far up or too far down.
- When doffing the mask, be sure you do not touch your face. Disinfect/clean your mask extender right after taking off your mask. If there are ridges or engraved areas, be sure these are cleaned. If this is not possible, then you should discard that mask extender and use a clean/new mask extender when putting on a new mask.
- Never use a mask extender with an N95 Respirator.

For more information, view the "PPE Questions of the Week – Mask Extenders: when & how to use?" at <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17048.aspx>