

Narratives on face mask wearing from members of Navigating Knowledge Landscapes Network - the contribution No. 15

Country: **PORTUGAL**

**Helena Machado**

University of Minho

hmachado@ics.uminho.pt

Received May 16th, 2020

Part 1: The first COVID cases in Portugal were reported on March 2. State of emergency in Portugal was announced in Portugal on March 20, which restricted severely movement rights and economic freedoms. Only fundamental supply chains for essential goods and services were ensured.

During the early stages of disease progression, mask wearing was not a common practice. The government only recommended its use (surgical masks) to all health professionals, people with respiratory symptoms and people entering and circulating in health institutions. One reason was the shortage of surgical masks and its high costs.

Only on 13 April the Portuguese government determined the compulsory use of face masks by all people staying indoors with multiple people and in public transportation. However, the government started recommending the use of community masks, reminding the general public that surgical masks were scarce and should be a priority access for health professionals. The government made efforts for certification and standardization of production of community face masks.

The citizens' compliance to mask wearing indoors is very high. The use of face masks in the streets, although not mandatory, is becoming a general practice. There are many uncertainties regarding access to masks. Companies and institutions that do not provide free masks to their workers, for financial reasons, are being heavily criticized. The price of surgical masks is very inflated. Access to certified community masks is very scarce yet

Part 2: I believe that the use of a mask is a complementary measure to limit the transmission of COVID-19. But it is especially important to maintain physical distance and frequent hand washing. I am concerned that the general public is looking at the use of a mask as a protective measure against the disease. They are less compliant compared to other even more important measures such as washing their hands frequently and avoiding physical proximity. During the weekend, it is now normal to see large groups of people, wearing a mask

but not keeping their physical distance safe. Another aspect that concerns me is the incorrect use of a mask: from its incorrect placement to the fact that many people wear surgical masks more than once or for longer than what is recommended. Some people with asthma have experienced an aggravation of symptoms, which they associate with the accumulated moisture in the masks.

Part 3: The use of a mask is seen as an act of responsibility and altruism. However, I notice that people with masks tend to avoid personal interaction and to decrease the time they talk to each other. They avoid looking at others. Another group of people who prolong personal interaction or fail to maintain physical distance or even end up removing their masks while talking

Part 4: Since the use of a mask started to become widespread, people seem to feel safer and unfortunately are more at risk (for example, not maintaining physical distance, making appointments with extended family and friends, etc.)