


27. KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICE ON MASK WEARING FOR RESPIRATORY TRACT INFECTIONS DURING THE POST COVID-19 PERIOD AMONG VISITORS COMING TO THE OUT PATIENT DEPARTMENT AT TEACHING HOSPITAL, PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA.

Lakmini Senevirathne¹, Chethana Herath¹, Tashini Wijesuriya¹, Imantha Fernando¹, Thisara Hewawasam¹, Dechen Nidup¹, Veranja Liyanapathirana¹

¹ Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya

 <https://www.youtube.com/live/fSpXH-3Xy5w?t=1103s>

BACKGROUND: During the Covid-19 period, mask wearing was widely used to prevent disease transmission. Continued practice of mask wearing during the post pandemic period along with its proper understanding would contribute to further reduction of respiratory tract infections in future. Therefore, we aimed to assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices towards mask wearing for preventing respiratory tract infections in our study population.

METHODS: A cross-sectional descriptive study was done with 423 visitors aged 18 to 75, including visitors and caregivers who came to Out Patient Department (OPD) in Teaching Hospital, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Ethical approval was obtained, and data was collected by using a validated self-administered printed questionnaire in April 2024. Participants were also observed during the interview to evaluate their mask wearing practices. A knowledge score was calculated and compared with demographic variables. **RESULTS:** Of 394 completed questionnaires, 273(69.3%) were female and 199(50.51%) were patients and the majority were young adults (18y-35y). The mean age

was 34.05y (SD – 13.89). The overall knowledge score which was not normally distributed varied from 6 to 18 out of 19 with a mean of 14.41(SD 2.30) and a median of 15.00 (IQR= 13-16) which didn't significantly differ across age, gender, experience and vaccination status of Covid-19. The majority (207, 52.5%) had moderate (60-79%) overall knowledge. The median knowledge was higher among those who were educated above school level (16.00, IQR 14-17) than those with school education (14.00, IQR 16-13) ($p < 0.001$). Most 367 (93.2%) declared they knew how to wear a mask properly while 349 (88.6%) declared they knew the indications to wear masks in the post-pandemic period. Vaccination caused a negative impact on attitude as those who uncompleted vaccination schedule agreed with necessity while those with completed vaccine schedule did not. Only 133 (33.8%) had responded that they were wearing masks in the post pandemic period. All 133 has good knowledge (80 – 100%) on mask wearing. On observation only 74 (18.8%) were wearing masks. The majority who were wearing masks while participating (56/74, 75.68%) were either having respiratory symptoms or accompanying someone with respiratory symptoms while of the 320 who were not wearing masks 205 (64.06%) were having respiratory symptoms or accompanying someone with respiratory symptoms. **CONCLUSION:** Although the study shows all of the participants who declared that they were wearing a mask during the post Covid-19 period possessed a good knowledge score, the overall knowledge of the majority on the transmission of respiratory tract infections and mask usage was moderate. Further, observed practices indicated that those with or accompanying those with respiratory tract infections were not wearing masks.

Key Words: Respiratory Tract Infections, Mask, COVID – 19.