



#Masks4allinAfrica

Part of #Masks4all

20 April 2020

To South Africa's National Coronavirus Command Council:

You have taken immediate, bold action to slow the spread of Covid-19 in South Africa. (1) We applaud you for your leadership. But we want to bring an additional powerful tool to the fight: *homemade masks*.

We understand that all of the below are essential to fight back against this deadly COVID-19 pandemic:

- Staying at home.
- Physical distancing – two metres - everywhere possible
- Regular hand washing for at least twenty seconds
- No touching of the face
- Wide-spread screening and intensive contact tracing
- Wide-spread testing for all

South Africans are called upon to make their contribution to curb the spread of Covid-19. An important addition is #Masks4All.

We have already seen important steps in the right direction. There have been announcements by the Department of Transport released a media statement on 1 April committing to undertake a programme to distribute masks on public transport. Minister Mkhize announced that members of the public caring for others with COVID-19 disease should wear masks, as well as members of the public who are coughing or sneezing. However, new evidence suggests that nearly half of people with SARS-CoV-2 infection do not have symptoms, yet still spread the virus. (2) Wearing a mask helps to prevent the spread of viral diseases like influenza and COVID-19 (3, 4) The main function of such masks is to protect others by preventing the spread of infectious droplets.

However, masks in South Africa would have added benefit. We are facing concurrent pandemics, battling tuberculosis (TB), an airborne disease that is one of our leading causes of death, and now COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic is predicted to have a very negative impact on TB care, leading to increased deaths, with previous TB also making people more vulnerable to COVID-19 disease. (5) Masks are already in use at health facilities in South Africa for visiting patients to wear to reduce the spread of TB. And there is strong evidence that they help reduce the spread of TB by 56% (6) in health facilities, but also in taxis, shopping centres and SASSA (social grant collection) queues.

We understand that there is a critical global shortage of N95/FFP2 respirators and surgical masks and **we understand why these should be reserved for use in healthcare settings**. As members of the general public we therefore commit to not buying or hoarding or using these respirators and surgical

masks. We also call on all citizens and organisations to donate any surgical masks or respirators that they might have to their nearest health facility.

The big question is, how can we support public mask use, while not using the supplies that health facilities urgently need to protect health workers and patients?

Here, we can look abroad for examples of countries which have promoted population level mask wearing, some using homemade masks, including China, Hong-Kong, Korea, and the Czech Republic (7). This can be done using simple equipment at home (8). While homemade masks are not a perfect solution, they have some evidence for efficacy (9, 10). And South Africa would benefit from an additional preventive strategy for TB.

Population-wide use of homemade masks is a critical prevention strategy against Covid-19 and TB.

As our Rainbow Nation's inspirational leaders, we ask you to:

1. Help mobilise South Africa through publically encouraging our creative and resourceful citizens to make alternative masks on a mass scale.
2. Provide technical guidance on the best materials and templates for making masks at home or places of work or learning.
3. Use existing communication platforms for widespread public education on correct and safe use.

#Masks4All can be a powerful shared tool for preventing the spread of COVID-19 and TB in South Africa!

* To add your organisation, or individual signature, please send your name and affiliation via email to ingrid.tbproof@gmail.com or WhatsApp at +27 76 892 1974.

Organisational Sign-on:

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TB Proof
Public Health Action Team (PHACT)
#Mask4allinAfrica
Rural Health Advocacy Project (RHAP)
WONCA Africa
AfroPHC
Westdene Sophiatown Residents Association
South African National Tuberculosis Association (SANTA)
Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation
Epidemic Control & Diagnostics (EPCON)
Wote Youth Development Projects
Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)
Ghana National TB Voice Network
INPSWALO ASSOCIATION - Vincentian Association to Fight AIDS and TB
Maskers Foundation Irene
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For a full list of references for the global Masks4All campaign, please visit:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HLrm0pqBN_5bdyysOeoOBX4pt4oFDBhsC_jpbIXpNtQ/preview