

# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

A toolbox talk.

## Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!



The aim of this talk is to raise your awareness about the benefits of wearing your respiratory protective equipment – more commonly referred to as masks – effectively. This talk will provide guidance on the importance of fit testing for tight-fitting masks and practical tips on how to carry out a fit check.

# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

**Why should I wear my mask?**



# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

**Why should I wear my mask?**

**Because not wearing one...**



**can make  
you ill**



**can affect your  
life and family**



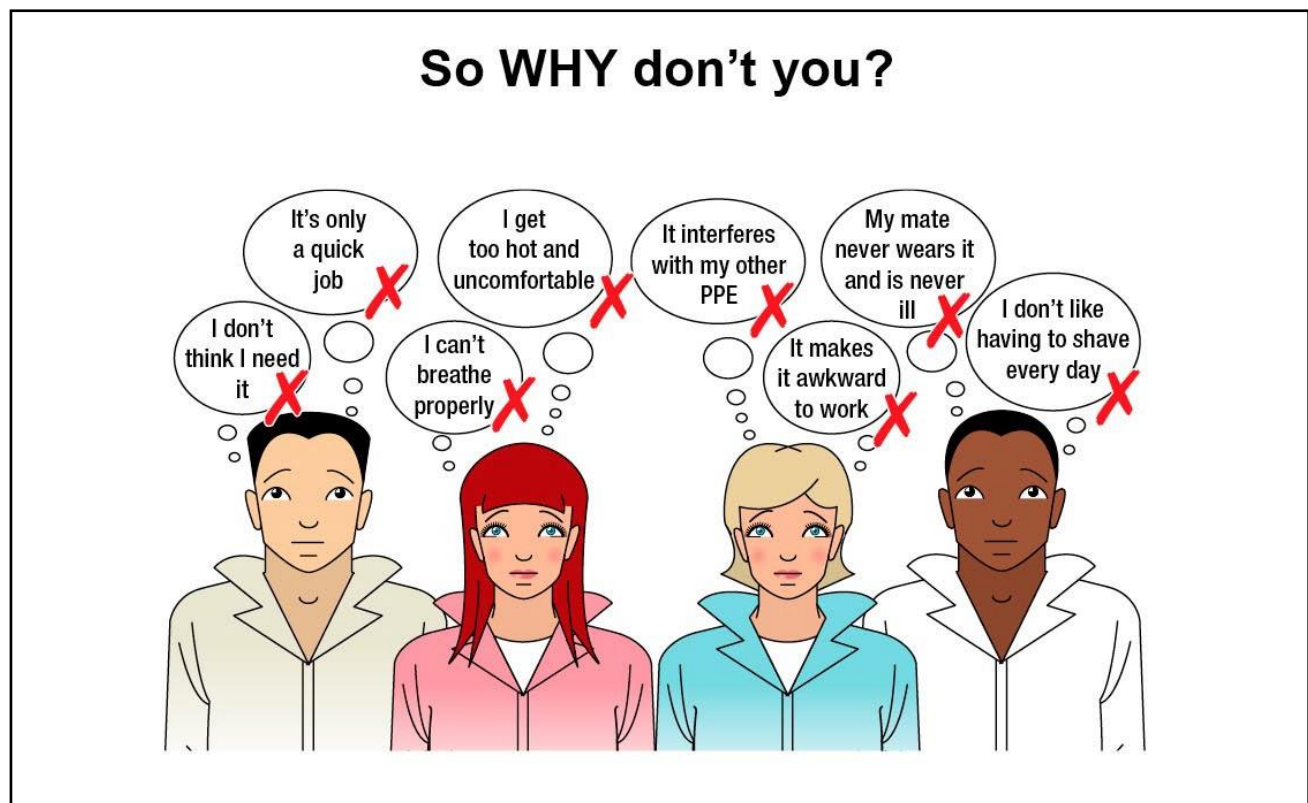
**can  
kill you**

The main benefit of wearing a mask is that it helps prevent you from getting ill and therefore helps keep you working. Specifically, it helps prevent the development of illnesses which could affect your airways – which could reduce the quality and length of your life.

Wearing a mask can stop you from developing the symptoms of respiratory illness caused by inhalation of hazardous substances at work (for example, coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness or difficulty in breathing).

There were an estimated 12,000 deaths in 2009/10 and another 12,000 deaths in 2010/11 from long-term exposure to respiratory hazards at work.


## Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!



Some common answers from people are listed in the slide.

# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

**So WHY don't you?**



Even a few minutes' exposure could make you ill ✓

You might not be able to see the hazard but it is still dangerous ✓

You might not think it is making you ill but about 12 000 people die each year from long-term exposure to respiratory hazards at work ✓

Many dangerous substances exist as a fine dust or fume, or as a gas or vapour which you cannot see in the air. (Think about the oxygen we breathe – we can't see it.)

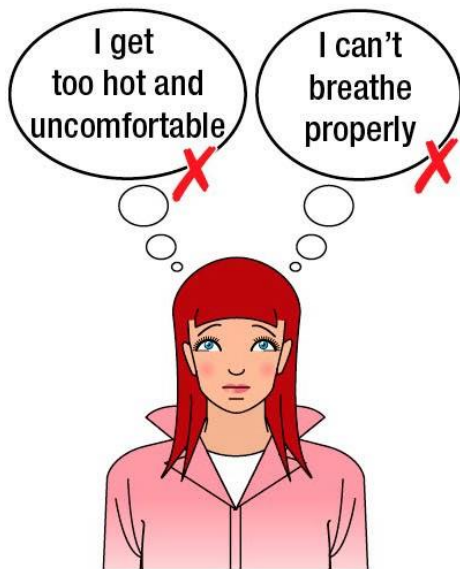
Your employer must protect your health and needs to inform you of the hazards you may be exposed to at work.

Your employer needs to work with you to reduce the risks to you from potential exposures to these dangerous substances. It may be that a risk assessment indicates that only a few minutes' exposure to a substance in the air could harm your health, whether now or later.

An estimated 12,000 people die each year in the UK from long-term exposure to substances that you can breathe in at work. If wearing a mask is the method your employer has chosen to protect your health, it is important that you are involved in selecting the mask you are going to wear.

# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

## So WHY don't you?



Get involved in choosing the mask your employer will provide, there are many different masks available ✓

Ask for advice on how to fit the mask properly ✓

You could have some discomfort but this will reduce over time as you get used to the mask ✓

Talk with your employer about selecting a different mask, or for more advice if it is uncomfortable after a few days ✓

Masks and filters need changing regularly ✓

Getting involved in choosing your mask will help you find a more comfortable mask which is suitable for you. Different masks are available, with different sizes and designs. Depending on the shape and size of your face, you may require a different mask. **One size does not fit all.**

Some masks require a tight fit to your face. With these types, it is essential that you are fit tested as part of the selection process to ensure that the mask forms a good seal to your face.

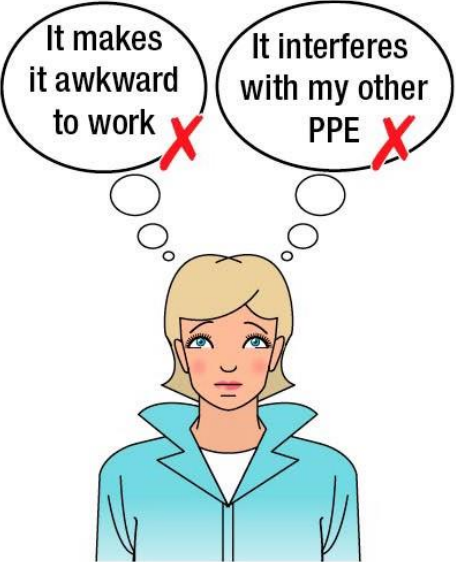
At first, the mask may feel uncomfortable (for example, you may experience some resistance or a slight increase in the effort required to breathe through your mask). If this is something you can't tolerate, you need to talk to your employer or safety representative about the possibility of using a different type of mask which is more comfortable to wear and still provides the level of protection needed. For example, during heavy manual work you may be more comfortable using an air-fed or powered respirator.

Some masks, such as disposable dust masks, should be replaced every day. Reusable masks will eventually become clogged and you may notice it becomes harder to breathe through – which means the filter needs changing.

To reduce the likelihood of this and other problems occurring with your mask, it is important that your employer provides suitable training for you on how to check, put on, use, maintain and store your mask. This training should include how and when you should change your mask's filters (if applicable), or when to dispose of your mask.

# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

## So WHY don't you?



- Talk with your employer and safety representatives about different work methods ✓
- Different types of masks and other PPE are available, ask your employer for more advice ✓
- Ask your employer about training on how to fit and use the mask and other PPE ✓


Your mask should be chosen so you can wear it correctly when doing your job. If your mask interferes with other PPE – such as your safety spectacles/goggles and hard hat – it is important to sort this problem out. Your employer has an obligation to ensure that any PPE provided does not create extra hazards for you. All your PPE needs to be compatible so that it all works effectively when worn together. If this is not the case, it may mean a different type of mask needs to be selected (e.g., instead of combining individual items of equipment (such as a hard hat and mask), you could replace this with PPE of an integrated design, such as a helmet/mask combination).

The training given by your employer should include how to fit and use all your PPE. If you are unsure about fitting and using a mask with other PPE, do not hesitate to seek further advice from your employer.



# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

## So WHY don't you?



- Not everybody is affected in the same way and to the same extent ✓
- Like many illnesses, the effects can take time to develop ✓
- Many masks rely on a good seal against your face ✓
- Stubble and facial hair stops masks from sealing effectively ✓
- To do the job and stay healthy, you need to be clean shaven ✓
- If there are good reasons for having a beard (for example religious reasons) forms of RPE are available which do not rely on a tight seal to the face (for example hoods) ✓

Some people have said they don't wear their masks because other people they work with don't wear their masks and are never ill. However, it is important to remember that damage to health is not always immediately noticeable.

Also remember that people can be affected differently following exposure to hazardous substances – and, in the case of long-term ill-health – we don't know who is more likely to become ill (i.e., develop respiratory diseases). Why gamble with your health? An easy way to protect your long-term health is to wear your mask, if one has been provided, and wear it correctly.

Many masks rely on a good seal against the face so that, when you breathe air in, it is drawn into the filter material where the air is cleaned. If there are any gaps around the edges of the mask, 'dirty' air will pass through these gaps and into your lungs. It is therefore very important that you put your mask on correctly and check for a good fit every time.

Facial hair – stubble and beards – make it impossible to get a good seal of the mask to the face.

If you are clean-shaven when wearing tight-fitting masks (ie those which rely on a good seal to the face), this will help prevent leakage of contaminated air around the edges of the mask and into your lungs. You will therefore be breathing in clean air, which will help you stay healthy.

If there are good reasons for having a beard (e.g. for religious reasons), alternative forms of RPE, that do not rely on a tight fit to the face, are available.

## Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

### **OK, so WHEN do I need to wear my mask?**

When your employer informs you that you could be exposed to a respiratory hazard

Even if the job is only for a few minutes –  
**long-term effects can harm your future health!**

Even when you can't see the hazard –  
**many dusts and gases are invisible!**

Ok, so WHY do I need to wear my mask?  
**because your future health depends on it! ✓**

Your employer is responsible for looking after your health and safety when at work. They would have assessed the risks to your health so, if masks have been chosen, these need to be worn. Masks should be worn even for small, quick jobs that may take only a few minutes. Do not forget that you sometimes cannot see the hazard.



# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

## So HOW do I fit my mask correctly?



### For **FILTERING FACEPIECE (FFP)** (disposable mask)

- ✓ Clean shaven at start of your shift
- ✓ Always check the fit before every use:
  - fit around the nose/nose clip where applicable
  - fit around the chin
  - check the position of straps
- ✓ Carry out a 'fit-check'

Your employer must train you on how to fit your mask correctly. Here are some of the most important points for correctly fitting the filtering facepiece mask.

## So HOW do I fit my mask correctly?



### For **HALF-FACE** mask

- ✓ Clean shaven at start of your shift
- ✓ Always check the fit before every use:
  - fit around the nose
  - fit around the chin
  - check the position of straps
- ✓ Carry out a 'fit-check'

Your employer must train you on how to fit your mask correctly. Here are some of the most important points when fitting a half-face mask.

# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

## So HOW do I fit my mask correctly?



### For **FULL-FACE** mask

- ✓ Clean shaven at start of your shift
- ✓ Always check the fit before every use:
  - fit around the nose where applicable
  - fit around the chin
  - check the position of straps
- ✓ Carry out a 'fit-check'

Your employer must train you on how to fit your mask correctly. Here are some of the most important points when fitting a full-face mask.

# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

## Remember!

- Ensure the mask is clean and in good working order **before** each use
  - Carry out a fit check with your mask before each use
- Do not remove the mask in the hazardous area, for example to talk or to inspect your work
- Replace disposable masks and replaceable filters in line with your training
  - Store the mask in a clean area when not being used

Part of your training on how to use your mask should include how to maintain it, so you know what to do when it is likely to fail to protect you (e.g. when the exhalation valve has been removed and not replaced; when the face-seal surface is damaged; or when the battery unit for a powered mask is not working, etc.).

It is important that disposable face masks or filters are replaced at regular intervals, in line with your training and manufacturers' instructions. This can prevent excess clogging with contaminants reducing its performance, which can make breathing more difficult as breathing resistance increases.

It is also important that masks are stored in a clean area. Keep them away from working areas where it is known there is hazardous dust, fume, vapour or gas – or you could end up breathing in those contaminants the next time you put it on.

Keeping masks in a clean area will help prevent contamination while they are not in use.

## Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

### Summary

- Just because you can't see the hazard doesn't mean it's not there
- Always wear your mask when required
- Badly fitting masks don't protect you

**Wear your mask and wear it correctly to Stay healthy!**

# Your mask can protect you – Stay healthy!

Your mask can protect you  
**Stay healthy!**



Your employer has a responsibility to provide you with the correct mask. You have the responsibility to wear it correctly.

