

Introduction: Correct use of facemasks prevents COVID-19 spread. Improper disposal of used facemasks promotes spread of infection and environmental pollution. This study assessed the knowledge and practises of facemask usage during COVID-19 infection among employees of the University of Colombo.

Method: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among academic, non-academic and administrative staff, consisting of individuals representative of general community with dynamic socio- demographic backgrounds and educational levels. All consenting respondents to a pre-tested, web-based, self-administered questionnaire, e-mailed once by the university Network Operating Centre were recruited. To assess the knowledge and usage patterns, scores were given separately for the questions assessing them.

Results: All 208 respondents (male: female = 33:19) always wore facemasks using the correct technique when leaving home. Majority preferred N-95 (70%) masks or surgical masks (64%) over cloth masks (3%) and most practised double-masking (81%). However, use of facemasks was only 70% at workplace, 50% while using public transport, 51% at home when an outsider was present and 28% at home when with a family member having respiratory symptoms. Removing/lowering facemask in public washrooms (19%), at public places with a 1m distance between each other (7%) or when answering phone calls (3%) was reported. Main problems encountered were; difficulty in breathing (59%), feeling hot (50%), spectacle-fogging (42%), and earache (42%). Majority disposed facemasks by burning (46%) or with garbage collected by municipal council (38%). Knowledge scores on face masks were significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) in females. Correct facemask usage scores were significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) in academics and employees with educational level $> A/L$. Low response rate (10%) is a limitation.

Conclusion: Though the majority adhered to the correct facemask usage, some unsatisfactory practices were evident, which require prompt intervention to optimise mask literacy and practices. Reinforcing education on the value and use of facemasks and developing methods for disposal are immediate necessities.