



MINISTRY OF HEALTH WELLNESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Advice on the use of face shields in the context of COVID-19

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Background

Antigua and Barbuda saw its first case of COVID-19 in March 2020. In order to control the outbreak, the government of Antigua and Barbuda implemented several public health measures such as the wearing of facemasks, social and physical distancing and handwashing. Compliance with all these measures including physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and adequate ventilation in indoor settings is essential for reducing the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Introduction

Face shields are designed to be used provide protection from splashes of biological fluid (particularly respiratory secretions), chemical agents and debris into the eyes. In the context of protection from SARS-CoV-2 transmission through respiratory droplets, they are used by health workers as personal protective equipment (PPE) for eye protection in combination with a medical mask or a respirator.

In the context of COVID-19 in community settings, some children and adults may not be able to wear a mask for a variety of reasons (e.g. health issues, fear of mask), and thus, face shields may be considered as an alternative to masks as respiratory droplet protection or as source control, based on availability, improved feasibility and better tolerability.

While a face shield may confer partial protection of the facial area against respiratory droplets with the added benefit of ease of use, the effectiveness of face shields for source control has not yet been adequately studied. Droplets may be exhaled or inhaled from the open gaps between the visor and the face, which is a disadvantage inherent to its design. Other design disadvantages include glaring, fogging, optical imperfection, and being bulkier than goggles and safety glasses. There are many emerging face shield designs that attempt to overcome these limitations, but current laboratory testing standards only assess face shields for their ability to provide eye protection from chemical splashes. Further research and laboratory challenge standards are urgently needed to investigate the effectiveness of face shields for respiratory droplet protection and/or source control.

Purpose of the document

Some persons have been using to use face shields as a replacement of face masks. This document provides information on the use of face shields in Antigua and Barbuda in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These guidelines were adapted for Antigua and Barbuda from information from the World Health Organization. The MOHWE will continue to monitor emerging information on the use of face shields for the prevention of respiratory virus transmission and update this document as new evidence emerges.

Specific Recommendations

1. At present, face shields are considered to provide a level of eye protection only and **should not** be considered as an equivalent to masks with respect to respiratory droplet protection and/or source control.

2. The Ministry of Health Wellness and the Environment advises that when physical distance cannot be maintained, and in special situations where it is not practical to wear a mask (for example, among children with hearing loss or other disabilities or health conditions that limit compliance with wearing fabric or medical masks and consequently their utility), face shields may be used while taking the following considerations into account:
 - The face shield is an incomplete physical barrier and **does not** provide the filtration layers of a mask.
 - The face shield should cover the entire face, be wrapped around the sides of the face and extend to below the chin.
 - Reusable face shields must be properly cleaned (with soap or a detergent and water), disinfected (with 70-90% alcohol) and stored after each use. Face shields that will withstand the use of disinfectants without damaging their optical properties should be selected.
 - Maintaining physical distance of at least 1 m (3.3 feet) should be maintained where feasible, with ongoing promotion of frequent hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
 - Caution should be taken to avoid injury when children don, wear, and doff face shields and they should be supervised at all times.