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Wearing a Mask and Conjunctivitis

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Dear Editor,

The corona-virus (COVID-19) pandemic started in Wuhan and spread from there to many countries. The most common symptoms are respiratory problems, fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Patients may initially experience diarrhea and nausea [1]. After the spread of this unknown virus and following the surprise of doctors, many hypotheses were raised to prevent the spread of the corona-virus. Some of these hypotheses were frequent hand washing, surface disinfection, and wearing mask. Wearing a mask is the best way to prevent the transmission of corona-virus, which is used to prevent the spread of infection by sneezing and coughing.

In fact, in our opinion incorrect mask wearing may send breathing air from the mouth and nose to eyes and increase the risk of eye infection and cause conjunctivitis. Also sometimes the upper part of the mask comes in contact with the eyes and eyelashes, and this repeated contact causes the transmission of infection from the mask to the eyes, which may cause conjunctivitis.

Conjunctivitis is one of the most common eye diseases. It is an inflammation of the outermost white layer of the eye and the inner layer of the eyelid that can affect one or both eyes. It is caused by viral and bacterial agents and spreads easily among people [2]. Conjunctivitis may be infectious or noninfectious causes. Viruses and bacteria are the most important infectious causes. Viral infection is the most common cause of this disease [3].

Nowadays, experiments have shown that the risk of corona virus transmission through the eyes is very low; however, because the eyes and nose are so close together and the upper edge of the mask is about one centimeter below the eyes, infectious agents of the mouth may enter the eyes. Based on above mentioned points, we recommend avoiding masks in low-traffic areas and in places with low population density to reduce the risk of conjunctivitis. It is worth noting that proper wearing of face mask may reduce the probability of transmitting the infectious agents to the eyes. Moreover, people are advised to disinfect their hands before wearing the mask because direct or indirect touch of the eyes with the hands is one of the most common ways to cause ocular infection [4]. Finally, due to the distance between the upper edge of the mask and the face, which may expose the eyes directly to the breathing air pathogens, the use of goggles may solve this problem [5].

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