



CLINICAL PRACTICE ALERT

Guidance for Maintaining Skin Health When Utilizing Protective Masks for Prolonged Time Intervals

WOCN Board of Directors Task Force

Frequently Asked Questions	Answers
Will the application of the alcohol-free barrier film interfere with integrity of FPE?	No. The alcohol-free barrier film should not interfere with the mask integrity since it adds no material to the area that would influence the seal.
How do I remove the alcohol-free barrier film from my face at the end of my shift?	The alcohol-free barrier film can remain in place without harm to skin. It may be removed with adhesive remover that may be found in your agency. If you find that the barrier stays on skin, it is protective and is not harmful and will continue to serve as a helpful barrier for skin protection.
I have seen others place dressings under masks. Is this okay?	Any type of dressing that changes the individually fitted N-95 mask is not recommended because the presence of the dressing may change the fit and potentially impair the seal. In general, surgical masks or other masks that do not require individual fitting, a thin hydrocolloid or thin foam dressing may be helpful to protect or heal skin. These dressings may be cut to fit the area of need. However, these should be used with abundant caution. A hydrocolloid should be carefully removed to avoid skin stripping. It may stay in place for up to 7 days. Ultimate guidance should be sought from the individual agency on this measure.
It seems like moisturizers should be used on our skin to help prevent issues. Is this true?	Moisturizers are important to protect skin health. They should be applied 1-2 hours prior to applying FPE. Moisturizing within 1-2 hours may impair the seal/fit/movement of the FPE. If moisturizing is desired, perform after shift has ended, following a shower, and let the moisturizer replenish your skin as you are recharging your body and mind.
Many use headbands with buttons or similar products to hold the elastic on some FPE to minimize irritation, soreness, and skin integrity issues in the ear area. Is this an acceptable practice?	Any type of mitigating measure that changes the individually fitted N-95 mask is not recommended because this measure may change the fit and potentially impair the seal. These devices have been reported as extremely helpful in both prevention of and relief for skin integrity issues in the ear area and may be acceptable for nonindividually fitted PPE. Guidance for use should be sought from the individual agency on this measure.

Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), especially masks, often causes skin injuries including moisture damage, friction, and pressure.

This document provides practical guidance to maintain skin integrity in the prolonged wear time of protective masks such as N-95 masks, surgical masks, face shields, and similar types of protective equipment. The head/face/cheek areas of an individual are at highest risk. This document is the culmination of input from WOC nurses across the United States, each working to provide guidance for skin integrity issues being seen in this unprecedented time. This is not an evidence-based document.

If a health care worker develops blanchable erythema (redness) or an abrasion on the face (eg, nose, cheeks, forehead) when utilizing facial protective equipment (FPE), or if preventive measures are needed for prolonged wear time, consider implementation of the following approach, after washing hands and donning gloves:

- Apply **ALCOHOL-FREE** barrier film to the face (eg, nose, cheeks, forehead, behind the ears). **AVOID application of the alcohol-free barrier film to the eyes/eyelids.**
- Prior to application of the alcohol-free barrier film, ensure that the area of the face to be protected (eg, cheeks,

nose, forehead, ears) is free of any makeup, oils, cream, lotions, etc.

- Using one of the alcohol-free barrier film packages, gently apply the barrier film to the areas where the metal plate/stay or elasticized portion of the FPE rests on soft tissue/bony areas.
- Allow the alcohol-free barrier film to dry for 90 seconds.
- Apply the FPE as you have been instructed/trained.
- Application of the alcohol-free skin barrier film should be applied only once per day.
- **DO NOT** place a dressing of any type (eg, foam, hydrocolloid) to the face under the N-95 mask/other individual-specific mask, as this may interfere with the mask's fit and seal.



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