

# Advice to health staff suffering skin damage from face masks

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Suffering from skin damage from face masks? An award-winning UK skin infection expert offers remedies to health staff and the general public Credit: Andrea Piacquadio via Pexels.com

Doctors and nurses on the COVID-19 frontline are spending many hours a day wearing face masks, and many members of the general public are doing the same. But although the devices offer invaluable protection, they can be the cause of significant skin damage through sweating and the rubbing of the masks against the nose.

Skincare experts at the University of Huddersfield are warning about the risks and are suggesting remedies.

Professor Karen Ousey is the University's Director of the Institute of Skin Integrity and Infection Prevention and was part of a team that conducted detailed research into the pressure damage caused by a wide range of medical devices, including face [masks](#). The findings and recommendations were published in February.

Now, the current emergency emphasises the problems that can arise with [face masks](#), being

worn for long periods by [healthcare professionals](#).

"The wearers are sweating underneath the masks and this causes friction, leading to pressure damage on the nose and cheeks," said Professor Ousey. "There can be tears to the skin as a result and these can lead to potential infection," she added.

"The masks the healthcare professionals are wearing have to be fitted to the face—so if healthcare professionals add dressings to the skin under the mask after being fitted there is a chance the mask will no longer fit correctly," continued Professor Ousey.

She suggests that people wearing masks keep their skin clean, well-hydrated and moisturised and that barrier creams should be applied at least half an hour before masks are put on.

"And we are suggesting that pressure from the mask is relieved every two hours. So you come away from the patient, relieve the pressure in a safe place and clean the skin again."

Professor Ousey advises members of the general public—such as shop workers—who are wearing masks to keep their [skin](#) clean, dry and free of sweat.

"And if they do feel their masks rubbing, take them off as soon as they safely can."

Professor Ousey was a member of a global team that last year met in London to pool research on device-related pressure ulcers. It has now produced a 52-page document – published by the *Journal of Wound Care* – that examines the issues in detail.

**More information:** Amit Gefen et al, Device-related pressure ulcers: SECURE prevention, *Journal of Wound Care* (2020). [DOI](#):

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