Students too cool for surgical masks?

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A project at the University of Michigan has students wearing surgical masks to monitor possible flu outbreaks, but some students have been slacking off.

The Chicago Tribune reported on the project, in which more than 800 students have volunteered to wear the surgical masks at all times except while eating and sleeping. The study, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is one of numerous studies worldwide to evaluate the effectiveness of such measures in controlling a potentially deadly flu pandemic.

But, the Tribune reported, while some students have been rigorous about keeping the masks on, many others have slacked off due to embarrassment or discomfort. Students have reported feeling silly wearing the mask, and others have talked about the masks being uncomfortable.

"It's hard to breathe with them on," said Kelly Patrick, 18, a project participant.

Experts have not altogether expressed surprise at some of the students not wearing the masks. Tomas Aragon, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Preparedness at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health, suggested that people may not be willing to take such measures until a dire threat is present.

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