

Communication Strategies & Voice Protection for Mask Users

TRANSCRIPT



TIME (MM:SS)

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00:00

Narrator: Welcome to the Communication Strategies and Voice Protection module for mask users. This is the second educational module in the Masks and Vocal Health: One Voice at a Time series.

00:12

During this video we will review the impact that masks have on voice and communication, and help you to identify whether or not you are having trouble. Then, we will provide strategies to improve communication and vocal health for those who wear masks throughout the day.

00:29

In the first video of this series, we learned how face coverings can reduce the transmission of COVID-19. We then discussed the challenges face masks pose when communicating with one another.

00:41

These challenges include: a loss of visual information, a reduction in sound clarity, a reduction in sound articulation, and an increase in vocal effort and fatigue.

00:54

In our last video, we also discussed how communication challenges are driving people to remove their masks throughout the day in an effort to make it easier to talk and to be understood.

01:05

But we forget that when we take our masks off to speak, we are defeating the purpose of wearing the mask all together. The mask is there to prevent the spread of the droplets and aerosols created by activities such as speaking.

01:21

You may be wondering: how do I know if I am having a voice or communication problem? Ask yourself these questions: Do you repeat yourself frequently to be understood? Does your voice feel tired or hoarse at the end of the day? Do you have pain or tension in your throat, neck, or shoulder muscles that worsens when talking? Do you feel short-of-breath while speaking? Do you lose your voice altogether from talking? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you may be having more difficulty talking while wearing your mask. It is important to become aware of these signs and symptoms and to be able to identify them. Learning to monitor each of these symptoms in yourself can help prevent symptoms of vocal fatigue and communication problems from lingering or even starting in the first place.

02:17

In this module we will provide you with strategies to help you with any voice or communication problems you may be having. By utilizing these recommendations, we hope you will be less tempted to lower your mask when speaking and that your mask will be less of a barrier to effective communication.

02:35

A few ways to improve your communication and vocal health include: using microphone amplification, adjusting your body posture, increasing use of clear speech, making sure you stay hydrated, taking vocal rest breaks or naps throughout the day, and utilizing vocal warm-ups to prevent and minimize vocal fatigue.

03:03

Masks create a barrier to sound. Mask-wearers report that they have to speak loudly or yell to be heard through their masks. But, speaking loudly for long periods of time can lead to vocal fatigue, hoarseness, and other vocal problems.

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TRANSCRIPT

03:19

A personal amplification device can help you maintain a comfortable speaking volume. An amplification device is a small microphone that sits on the ears or pins to the shirt with a small, separate speaker worn on the body.

03:34

The microphone and amplification helps to increase your vocal volume and reduce strain. This can be especially helpful when communicating at a distance of 6-feet, or if you frequently communicate in a noisy environment.

03:49

Voicing requires the coordination of your mouth to articulate, your voice box for sound, and your lungs for air. Without proper alignment of these systems, you may experience vocal fatigue, muscle tension, and feelings of breathlessness while speaking. Therefore, focusing on body posture and alignment can help your speech be more efficient and easy.

04:14

First, try and reduce tension and ease your breathing. If you are feeling breathless while wearing your mask, you may raise or tense your shoulders and strain your neck forward.

04:33

You can check yourself in the mirror and ensure your ears are over your shoulders. Taking a deep breath in through your nose prior to speaking may also be helpful.

04:43

Masks reduce our ability to articulate different sounds, making our speech sound mumbled. This is because masks restrict the movements of your lips, jaw, and tongue.

04:56

To counteract the impact of the mask, try to speak more slowly while over pronouncing your speech sounds. Focus on opening your mouth wider, and move your mouth more during speech. This is a technique known as “clear speech” because it should make your sounds more clearly understood by others. Here is an example.

05:18

Courtney Kendall, M.A.: A rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors. A rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors. A rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors. A rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors.

05:37

Narrator: The person speaking on the left side of the screen is not using any clear speech techniques. She is mumbling. The person on the right is using clear speech to over articulate her sounds. **(In background, Courtney Kendall, M.A.:** A rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors. A rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors. A rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors. A rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors.)

05:56

Drink up! Hydration is key to a healthy voice. Try to keep a water bottle with a straw handy, to meet a daily minimum of eight, 8-ounce glasses of water a day. That’s a total of 64 ounces of water. Since you have to keep your mask on at work, it may be helpful to set reminders to take sips of water over the day. In addition to drinking water, try to limit coffee, teas, soda, alcohol and other dehydrating beverages. Your voice will thank you!

06:31

The muscles of the voice need a break just like any other set of muscles in the body. Just as we give our feet and legs a break from walking or standing during the workday, we should also give our voice a break. To ensure that you are not over using your voice, try scheduling vocal naps throughout your day. Try to observe 10 minutes of silence at least 2-3 times per day, or if possible, take a break for about 5 minutes per hour.

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07:05 One preventative step you can take to help set-up your voice for a successful day is a vocal warm-up. Have you ever noticed that your voice tends to sound a little rough or groggy in the morning? Well, just like how we warm-up the muscles in our bodies before exercising, your voice needs to be warmed up too.

07:24 Completing a vocal warm-up helps to stretch and bring blood flow to your throat muscles. Warming up the voice before your day could help to prevent the onset of vocal fatigue, hoarseness, and vocal injury that can occur when using your voice over long periods of time. Now that we communicate through face masks, warming up the voice before a long day is more important than ever.

07:48 **Renee Gustin, M.S., CCC-SLP:** One of the easiest and most effective ways to warm your voice up before a day at work is to simply hum. Gently humming for 3 to 5 minutes can improve the quality of your voice and help the voice come out more easily. First, begin humming at a comfortable pitch and volume. Focus on feeling vibrations in your nose, lips, and cheeks. Like this. Hmm. Hmm. Try to keep your lips, jaw, and neck relaxed. Once you have your hum established, try varying the pitch of your voice. You can go up and down to levels that feel comfortable to you. Like this. Hmm. Hmm. Make sure to listen to how your voice sounds. Is it raspy and hoarse? Or is it clear and strong? If you find yourself straining to produce a voice, take a break and start over.

08:48 **Narrator:** Vocal warm-ups can be completed anywhere. For instance, while you are in your car, walking to work, or getting ready for your day. It can be done while your mask is in place, making it ideal for any environment.

09:03 We established that masks indeed add a barrier to easy, and natural communication. Therefore, it is important to be proactive in keeping our voices healthy, while still communicating effectively.

09:15 If you find that you are repeating yourself more often, experiencing pain or discomfort in your throat, or feel that your voice is tired or hoarse, you may be having voice or communication problems.

09:28 We reviewed some strategies that may help. These include: microphone amplification to assist with loudness; having a relaxed but aligned posture; over articulating your sounds for clearer speech; staying hydrated; taking vocal breaks or naps throughout your day; and using a hum to warm-up your voice.

09:54 In our next module, we will provide more examples of how to apply these strategies during your typical day.

10:01 We hope these will help you to protect yourself and your community, one voice at a time.