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Headaches and the N95 face-mask amongst healthcare providers.

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• A comment on this article appears in "Respirators and headaches in industrial situations: suggesting a preventative solution." Acta Neurol Scand. 2007 Jul;116(1):72; author reply 73.

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Abstract

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During the 2003 severe acute respiratory distress syndrome epidemic, nealthcare workers mandatorily wore the protective N95 face-mask.

Methods

We administered a survey to healthcare workers to determine risk factors associated with development of headaches (frequency, headache subtypes and duration of face-mask wear) and the impact of headaches (sick days, headache frequency and use of abortive/preventive headache medications).

Results

In the survey, 212 (47 male, 165 female) healthcare workers of mean age 31 years (range, 21-58) participated. Of the 79 (37.3%) respondents who reported face-mask-associated headaches, 26 (32.9%) reported headache frequency exceeding six times per month. Six (7.6%) had taken sick leave from March 2003 to June 2004 (mean 2 days; range 1-4 days) and 47 (59.5%) required use of abortive analgesics because of headache. Four (2.1%) took preventive medications for headaches during this period. Multivariate logistic regression showed that pre-existing headaches [P = 0.041, OR = 1.97 (95% CI 1.03-3.77)] and continuous use of the N95 face-mask exceeding 4 h [P = 0.053, OR = 1.85 (95% CI 0.99-3.43)] were associated with development of headaches.

Conclusions

Healthcare providers may develop headaches following the use of the N95 face-mask. Shorter duration of face-mask wear may reduce the frequency and severity of these headaches.

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