

SAVING YOUR VOICE WHILST WEARING A MASK

Wearing masks is currently mandatory in Victoria due to COVID-19 restrictions and this is causing voice problems for many who are struggling to continue to work when challenged by this new “normal”.

Wearing a mask can cause your voice to become fatigued or tired when having to speak for prolonged periods of time. Here are some communication tips to help save your voice whilst wearing a mask and needing to communicate.

How masks make it harder to Communicate

- Can muffle or distort speech making it more difficult to be understood
- Masks take away the ability to lip read and see facial expressions, which is a major contributor to our hearing and understanding when communicating with others.
- Wearing a mask can be especially difficult for people who suffer from voice, hearing or communication problems and can affect those who suffer from anxiety or breathing problems such as asthma...the feeling of something covering the mouth can feel invasive to some and cause a feeling of shortness of breath or panic.

Tips for communicating with a mask

- Make sure you have your communication partners attention before speaking
- Face your partner directly
- Talk a little slower
- Articulate clearly
- Don't speak louder as this is likely to cause vocal strain and fatigue

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Tips for communicating with a mask (cont.)

- Use your hands and body language to assist communication
- Move to a quieter place if possible
- Talk more forward which will give your voice more vibrancy and carries it further
- Use adequate inflection and avoid a monotone voice as this can be fatiguing on the voice and make it harder to be understood.
- Ask children to read out instructions where possible to save your voice
- Use your breath well - Take a deep abdominal breath through your nose.

Make sure you don't take high breaths as this can create tension in the chest and throat. Use your abdominal muscles to project your voice. See below video links on how to do this:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xQJ2O4b5TM
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PnzaCn-Lis>

- Do vocal warm ups such as trills and sirens before you start teaching and at the end of the day. Just like you would stretch before and after a run, the vocal cords are muscles.
- Posture! Keep your jaw, neck, shoulders and chest relaxed. Stand straight and watch you are not pushing your head forward.
- Try not to force your voice
- Awareness - Be aware of your voice and if it's feeling strained or tired

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For Teachers (cont.)

STRAW EXERCISES - Do these at the end of the day or during breaks:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utMGP8h75nM#action=share>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYkqLediJZw>

Remember if you have a medical condition such as Asthma, Anxiety and/or Dysphonia, You may be able to obtain a medical exemption from wearing a mask.

Further tips and examples of exercises can be found at:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/voice-care-teachers/policy>

If you are really struggling and need further assistance, contact a Speech Pathologist who specializes in Voice Therapy or see a Laryngologist (ENT who specializes in Voice)

RESOURCES

<https://www.asha.org/News/2020/ASHA-Offers-Tips-for-Teachers-to-Protect-Their-Voices-This-School-Year/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/face-masks-shields-may-cause-vocal-strain-for-teachers-1.5743170>

<https://theconversation.com/the-science-of-how-you-sound-when-you-talk-through-a-face-mask-139817>

IN GOOD VOICE



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