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**Title: Face mask use in protecting against influenza-like-illness: A cross-sectional study on adults in Hong Kong**

## **ABSTRACT**

Influenza is an acute viral infection that adversely affects the health of the population worldwide, which causes severe morbidity and mortality every year, so the prevention of influenza is important. Face mask use (FMU) serves as an effective method to prevent transmission of influenza.

Practice of FMU can be divided into two categories – protecting oneself and others. People have different practice of FMU in public, home and clinics. Previous studies found that adults in Hong Kong were more likely to wear face mask in clinics for self-protection, and to wear face mask in public in response to influenza pandemics. Besides, people with different demographic factors practice differently regarding their FMU. Most studies mentioned above investigated practice of FMU in one area only. Although there was a study comparing the practice in these three areas, its participants were only targeted at outpatient and their caregivers. As there were limited studies investigating the practice among adults in Hong Kong against influenza-like-illness (ILI) in public, home and clinics, this study compared practice of FMU in these areas.

As this study aims at assessing practice of FMU in protecting against ILI among adults in Hong Kong a cross-sectional quantitative descriptive design was adopted. 1,036 participants were recruited by convenience sampling, and data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire included seven questions assessing participants' background characteristics and a six-item instrument assessing practice of FMU in protecting oneself and others (two categories) in public, home and clinics (three areas). Statistical analysis was carried out by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 22 (SPSS). Results showed that participants were more likely to wear face masks at clinics than in public or at home. Also, participants wore face masks for protecting others than protecting oneself against ILI no matter in which areas. Further analysis showed that the older ( $r_s=0.10$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), people who

work in health related field (10.04 (SD=5.18)), ( $t=-3.08$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) and women (9.78 (SD=5.40)), ( $t=2.53$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) were more likely to wear face masks.

To conclude, the practice of FMU is important for protecting against ILI no matter in clinics, public or at home. However, participants were less likely to wear face mask at home. Also, some types of participants including youngsters, men, and people who work in non- health related field rarely wore face masks. The government and nurses should promote FMU especially when people in contact with patients with ILI, especially for youngsters, men, and people who work in non-health related field, and at home through continuous education.