

Increase Awareness to manage used face mask for COVID-19

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Dear Editor,

Some studies already investigated and focused the environmental issue of face masks that are currently used to fight against COVID-19 over the whole world. Few countries such as Malaysia, Germany, Italy implied mandatory use of face mask to everyone. Most of the face masks are usually prepared by using disposable plastics. Moreover, they can stay in the atmosphere for a long time if discarded, which can affect the world and people in a variety of ways [1]. Over time, plastic breaks down into smaller parts, and the longer little remains in the area, the more it can decompose. Besides, plastics break into microplastics and finally into nano plastics that are much smaller. These small particles and fibres are mostly polymers that are long-lived and can accumulate in food chains. Millions of particles can be generated by just one mask, each with potential to also bring chemicals and bacteria up to the food chain and potentially even into humans. Meanwhile, studies indicate that individuals consume approximately 5 g of plastic per week, and that microplastic ingestion can expose the consumer to harmful chemicals. Those chemicals cause reproductive harm and obesity, as well as organic issues and childhood developmental delays [2]. According to company consulting company Grand View Research, global sales of disposable face masks will grow by an estimated 800 million dollars in 2019 to \$166 billion in 2020 [3]. In addition, it has been noticed in a survey cited in the Los Angeles Times that during the eight-week lockdown in Singapore which settled down on 1 June, 5.7 million people in the island city-states discarded another 1 470 tons of plastic waste alone from the picking and distribution of food [4]. Therefore, certain instructions must be followed in order to control this issue. According to the instructions of the Egyptian Ministry, the used face masks should be washed with soap and water for 20 seconds, then cut into small pieces so that they cannot be reused, and finally it can be safely disposed in a plastic container [5]. As part of the Ministry of Environment's "Live Green" environmental campaign, individuals should adopt such hygienic measures relating to the face masks used, releasing a promotional video to raise awareness of this hygienic measure. Likewise, WHO advised that whenever a used mask is accidentally touched, hands should be cleaned immediately utilizing alcoholic hand rubbing or soap and water when hands are absolutely dirty [6].

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