

The Sheer Grossness and Absurdity of Masks

Shôn Ellerton, August 26, 2021

Masks have their place in the right environment, but honestly, what I observe with general mask-wearing is kind of gross and absurd.



I sit here, in a fast food joint called Hungry Jacks in metropolitan Adelaide. Sitting next to me is my young son who's enjoyed opening up a little plastic toy as part of his Happy Meal. Millions of Australia citizens are under lockdown but here in South Australia, we are free to roam. At least for the time being.

Not far from me, I watch with interest and a tinge of disgust when two teenage girls are standing not far away from the service counter greedily munching down a greasy burger and chugging back two enormous chocolate milkshakes with mountains of cream coiled on top. They are wearing masks, but when they open their gobs to ingest the burgers, they pull down the mask a little to reveal an opening to allow for the food to be pushed through, leaving grease trails behind on the edges of the mask. Their fingers are sticky and greasy, making it seemingly impossible for the mask to be clean. I suspect that the mask is undergoing a sort of putrefaction, decomposing huge armies of bacteria eager to make anyone feel terribly queer in the stomach. They chew with their mouths open and slurp up their milkshakes leaving patches of cream on their masks. I am mesmerised by watching all this.

I am carrying one of those blue disposable masks with me and, admittedly, it is the same one I had from last week. In fact, I am sitting on it in whilst being in my back pocket; however, I seldom use it except in more crowded conditions like the train to work or one of those many frequent visits to Bunnings, a large hardware store chain in Australia. I remind myself to change it more often, because, frankly, it's beginning to smell a bit. Imagine if one can roll up all the

dirt and bacteria in a lump from one's nose accumulated for a lifetime. How big would it be? Beach ball size? Bigger? I'll have to work it out one day. Apparently one can make candles of ear wax, but that's another story!

Later in the week, I'm walking the streets of downtown Adelaide which are, by no means, heavily crowded. I'd say about sixty percent of pedestrians are wearing a mask. I avoid any indoor areas as much as possible due to the mask mandates in indoor public settings; however, I sense that feeling of being an outcast by some of those masked who, walking towards me in the opposite direction, give me an exceptionally wide berth. I am potentially diseased and might spread something really nasty, as if it was a deadly strain of ebola. I am made to feel dirty and unclean by the disapproving eyes of the masked. I walk along nonchalantly feeling reasonably confident that I'm not going to drop dead on the pavement, especially having had both doses of the vaccine. I consider the thought that, perhaps, some of those masked may not yet have been vaccinated, but I suspect many who are not, probably do not want to be vaccinated. As for those who *do* want to vaccinate and scared of contracting it, I apologise for my maverick behaviour and I fully understand the reason of giving someone a wide berth. In all honesty, vaccinations have been available for some time now, and the prospect of walking around with a muzzle on seems increasingly more absurd. And my oh my, do some people look strange with masks on. One normally associates masked people as those sort of villainy types eager to raid the local store, but I find it oddly comic watching a lot of short obese people side on walking up and down the streets with a mask on. They look kind of like overstuffed penguins with their beaks cut off.

I look down where I am walking, and frequently come across a sea of discarded disposable face masks lying on the ground. Australian cities are usually pleasantly void of litter on the ground, but face masks can regularly be seen scattered here and there. I am thinking of the poor sod who has to pick these up from the ground; probably donned with a hermetically sealed hazmat suit. I can think of nothing more disgusting than a used face mask, followed by a used piece of chewing gum a far second to that.

Then I spot a number of single-driver motorists with their face masks on and their windows closed. I pontificate as to what they are trying to protect. Perhaps they are trying to protect themselves from themselves. Maybe they've forgotten that they're wearing a mask at all as they just feel comfortable having it on, much like when a woman who has been forced to wear a burka all her life is

told that she no longer has to wear one. I just don't know. The mind plays tricks.

There was a time when one had to take off any face coverings before going into a shop to, presumably, deter any would-be robbers. Remember those days? Now it's the opposite way around. I walk into a shop, forgetting to don my face mask, and I'm given the stare-down in case I might breath a deadly miasma into the shop premises as if releasing a canister of deadly VX gas. Of course, this would happen regardless of whether one wears a mask or not, unless one is very good at holding his or her own breath for several minutes and not talking. Remember, the size of a virus to a person is the same as comparing a garden pea to the whole of Mount Everest. Honest! I worked it out.

But there's a silver lining behind every cloud. I don't like crowds and bumping into people so if I can create a virtual bubble around me. That's cool with me. I played this same trick many many years ago driving around an extensively battered, rusty and paint-streaked white Ford Granada around the streets of London. I drove along generally unimpeded by others, except for white van drivers, for fear of me being an uninsured irresponsible young driver.

The most absurd thing I recently heard is that in the neighbouring state of Victoria, its premier has decreed that masks may not be removed to drink an *alcoholic* beverage. I thought this was a joke and looked it up and sure enough, it is there stated on the government website. What is truly vexing about this is that the website gives no guidance on how to consume a beverage with a mask on or why it applies only to alcoholic beverages. Perhaps if one made a neat little hole in it for a beer bottle or a plastic straw (oh wait, they've been banned and the paper ones don't work for more than a minute or two), or perhaps drink *through* the mask with the hope that whoever does this will throw the mask away after use. Ah yes. Snot-infused beer!

How I look back before the pandemic and wonder that only a very few have ever worn masks, mostly those in the medical industries or by those working with noxious substances. And let's not forget those masked robbers and thieves or those who crave anonymity. Those were the days!