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# Single mom makes living sewing face masks amid Covid-19 mask shortage

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- A young single mother has started her own business making masks, which she distributes in rural areas

- Currently there's a huge debate on the subject of a face mask's efficiency, with the World Health Organisation saying there is no evidence to suggest it curbs the spread

- However, some experts believe it does indeed work, as studies into other coronaviruses proved masks can reduce the risk

- Either way, Thina Badela is filling a huge gap in the market thanks to a nationwide shortage of equipment

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***By Farai Diza - Freelance Journalist***

The continued face mask shortage ripping throughout South Africa has motivated a young woman entrepreneur to rethink her business venture.

Thina Badela, who makes a living through selling cosmetics, has started sewing masks from cloth donated to her by a fashion designer friend.

The 24-year-old single mother sold over 200 masks in a week and said doing something to curb the spread was important.

*“People have responded very well to my masks and many are buying in bulk. My wish is for everyone who can to sew masks and gloves that will protect everyone from the virus.*

*“I did not have many expectations when I started but people have shown tremendous support,” she narrated.*

Her masks are mostly sold in rural areas.

Badela stated that masks are unevenly distributed in rural areas and the only way to defeat the virus was through working together.



Thina Badela now sews and sells masks in rural areas where there's a huge shortage. PHOTO: Supplied  
Source: UGC

The raging coronavirus has gotten more people scrambling for face masks in a bid to wade off the microscopic enemy which has killed over 60 000 and infected over one million humans worldwide.

### **Where does the World Health Organisation stand on the mask issue?**

Before the virus gatecrashed its way to global pandemic status, the World Health Organisation (WHO) issued an alert stating that people who needed masks were those who had the virus or those who were treating and taking care of patients.

In a sign of divided opinions, many international governments are now encouraging their citizens to wear masks all the time. This, they say, is an effective measure of curbing the spread.

The Centre for Disease Control and Protection has recommended all Americans to wear face coverings when they go to public places. Other nations which have encouraged their citizens to wear masks include China, Germany and Austria, while the Japanese have traditionally worn masks even for a common cold.

Could this be as a result of observations from scientists that wearing masks is indeed just as effective?

### To mask or not to mask: Local experts divided

Local health experts are torn between wearing and not wearing face masks, piling confusion on the ordinary man on the street.

Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize recently reiterated government's call for all people to wear masks, leading to mass stockpiling of the product. Unsurprisingly, commercially made masks have become virtually impossible to find on shelves.

*"There is no question that the use of masks is one of the best ways of preventing the spread of infec-*

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East London based anaesthetist, Dr Nils von Delft, agreed with the minister, writing on the #Ican-HelpBuffaloCity Facebook page, that it is important to find value through protecting each other.

*"At this point, we should all be acting as if we all have the virus, and as if everyone else has the virus. In this way we will protect ourselves and others," he wrote.*

Some experts, however, have argued that wearing a mask could provide a false sense of security, leading to some people becoming less vigilant in more important hygiene measures such as washing hands.

Stellenbosch University health expert Dr Kerrin Begg has stuck to the WHO's guns, maintaining there isn't any evidence which proves that the masks are effective. She also pointed out that masks are ideal for use in taxis and in informal settlements faced with social distancing challenges.

*"Washing one's hands with soap and maintaining social distancing has been the most effective thus far in containing the pandemic. Masks can be dangerous when they are essentially left lying around as they can easily lead to the spread of the infection. Especially those that belong to people who are positive and their masks being laced with excrement," she divulged.*

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**What can be learnt from recent studies into wearing masks?**

Studies of mask use to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, which include acute respiratory syndrome, another form of coronavirus, have shown that wearing masks can lower the risk of infection. This is best effective when the masks are used with hand hygiene and social distancing.

University of KwaZulu-Natal Covid-19 War Room team member and infectious disease specialist Dr Richard Lessells said:

*“The mask acts in the same way as covering your mouth and nose with a tissue. When people think about wearing a mask, they think it’s to protect themselves, but in fact it will be for other people’s benefit.”*

He added that it was important to differentiate between infected people or potentially infected people wearing masks to prevent the spread compared with healthy people using masks to protect themselves from the virus.

Dr Siddhartha Mukherjee, assistant professor of medicine at Columbia University, recently wrote an article about how the coronavirus behaves inside patients stating that:

*“The mask works two ways – not only to protect you from me, but me from you.”*

While the debate pot of whether one should mask or not is filled to the brim, it is evident that many people are more worried about breathing in the coronavirus than listening to what professionals have said.

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