Protect the Flock- Face Masks and the Gym

On August 17, 2020, a new health campaign called Protect the Flock—developed by University of Delaware students, faculty, and staff—launched to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) both on and off the UD campus. The “Protect the Flock” campaign will include campus signage, social media, promotional items, and other programming throughout the fall semester to keep the community as safe and healthy as possible.

As the fall semester gets underway nationwide, universities must meet state and local public health mandates for face coverings, social distancing, and other behaviors. “Face coverings and physical distancing are really important to prevent the spread of the virus, so it’s on all of us to keep each other healthy,” said Kasiyah Tatem, a junior political science major from the University of Delaware who participated in one of the student focus groups over the summer.

These mandates have become the new normal, right? It is now normal to walk through grocery store with our masks on and “try” to follow the arrows in the marked aisles. It is normal to work at our home offices and meet with colleagues on zoom daily. It is normal to sit in our driveways with our neighbors (possibly with our drink of choice) keeping our six feet apart. What is not so normal, or at least not used to, is exercising with a mask on (unless you are training to run or train in high altitudes!).

The Carpenter Sports Building (Lil Bob) will be opening August 31 where students and employees must register for access in advance, equipment will be spaced out at least by 6 feet apart, and face coverings will be required while in the facility in order to protect the community. Those who plan to exercise in the Lil Bob need to realize they should be masked to protect others. That said, it is important to take the necessary precautions in our workouts to remain safe while wearing a mask, especially if you have not tried this before.

If you return to the Lil Bob this Fall, it is important to begin at a lower level of intensity than what you are used to and then gradually increase exertion. According to Johnna Steller, a respiratory therapist with OSF HealthCare, warns even those who are extremely fit need to realize they will have to alter their intensity. “When your muscles burn, they create lactic acid and the lactic acid turns into Co2 so that Co2 is going to increase more if you’re doing a higher level of intensity of exercise,” Stellar explains. “You could get light-headed. You could get dizzy. You could even become confused if it’s for a long period of time,” she said.

Individuals with a pre-existing respiratory or cardiovascular condition are encouraged to take caution when exercising with a face mask as well according to Steller. Specifically, those clients who have chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder,
asthma, chronic bronchitis, pulmonary fibrosis and any other lung conditions should consult (i.e., via telemedicine) with a medical professional for personal instructions on exercising with a face mask.

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) has some additional tips for exercising with a mask:

- Make sure your mask is big enough to cover your nose and face for proper protection.
- The mask should feel comfortable and snug around your cheeks and nose. Try not to fidget with the mask while you are working out.
- If the mask restricts your breathing prior to exercise, it will not be good to wear during exercise.
- The advantage of a cloth mask is that it can be washed. Exercise enthusiasts who exercise regularly are encouraged to have a few masks so there is a clean, dry mask ready for each workout. Any laundry detergent will be fine for washing cloth face masks.
- If you tend to sweat a lot during your workout, perhaps bring a second mask with you and replace when it becomes damp. It is best to replace a damp mask (from workout sweat or outdoor humidity).

Stay safe and healthy!

For more information about the Lil Bob's reopening procedures and updates, please visit the University of Delaware's Recreation site or www.udel.edu/coronavirus.