

## HAIR

# “Is Hair a Liability?” Why Frontline Doctors and Nurses Need Protective Headbands

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BY ZOE RUFFNER

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Photo: Courtesy of Sydni Lane / @sydvic1ous

In the past month, as coronavirus has taken grip of the globe, fashion houses have made headlines for manufacturing masks, plexiglass face shields, and surgical gowns, while many beauty brands have pivoted from producing perfume and cosmetics to hand sanitizer. One need that's gone largely overlooked, however? Protective headbands.

“*Hair*, is it a serious liability? We [usually] don’t think about it as a fomite,” or a material likely to carry infection, New York City ER doctor Dara Kass said on a recent phone call with *Vogue*—but as the threat of the disease has ramped up, so too has the need for increased safety precautions. “Normally, my hair is down. Now, most of the men I know shaved their beards and heads, and when I go to work my hair is in a ponytail, braid, or bun”—and topped with a wide headband that’s printed with her last name. “It’s awesome,” she says of the personalized take, which keeps her lengths largely covered and has helped patients and staff recognize her despite the layers of protective wear obscuring her features.

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Dr. Kass, wearing a personalized headband, during her rounds. Photo: Courtesy of Dara Kass

Many doctors and nurses are going a step further and wearing surgical caps to prevent the potentially dangerous risk of leaving hair exposed. “Initially, they weren’t part of our PPE,” says Dr. Lina Miyakawa, a pulmonologist at Mount Sinai Beth Israel in New York. “But when we’re doing invasive procedures, like intubations, or we’re in the room for a long time period of time and there’s emergencies, such as a cardiac arrest and we have to do CPR—there’s droplets in the air that can land on our hair.” However, “they’re not the best,” she admits. “Long hair or bangs are especially hard to keep inside what is essentially an elastic shower cap.” A headband, she says, helps secure the cap in place.

Brands—such as Goody, which donated 400 of their elastic headbands to New York-Presbyterian—are starting to step up to the plate. When Robyn Berkley, co-founder of the New York City-based activewear line Live The Process, saw a selfie posted on Instagram by the ER nurse Sydni Lane—her face bearing the marks of 13 hours of wearing an N95 mask; a headband covering the crown of her head—a lightbulb went off: “I had been trying to figure out how to support these [medical workers] at hospitals. Then I saw this photo and was like, *Oh my god*,” recalls Berkley, whose designs include a headband made out of the same Supplex fabric as her leggings and sports bras. Originally made with movement in mind, Berkley’s hair accessory is, by design, sweat-wicking and machine-washable, a necessity, notes Dr. Kass, who throws her headbands in the laundry with her scrubs at the end of the day. In the past two weeks, Live The Process has begun to donate its stretchy version to hospitals, including Elmhurst and Mount Sinai, and plans to produce more pieces out of leftover fabric scraps if and when its supply runs low.



Medical workers at New York-Presbyterian wearing Live The Process headbands. Photo: Courtesy of Courtney Flynn

It's a matter individuals can take into their own hands, too: Dr. Miyakawa recommends people reach out to local community hospitals, which are often not as well-equipped as larger branches, to donate batches of bands, while Dr. Kass encourages those who have friends on the front line to make headbands that can be handed out at health-care centers. "Watching people be creative with masks has been really inspiring. Could you take a bunch of old t-shirts and turn them into headbands? Could you go even further than a headband and make a scalp covering?" she asks. That said, while eye-pleasing iterations are welcome—Live The Process's assortment, available in an array of mood-boosting colors, have "put a smile on so many women's faces," says Berkley—they must, above all, be "functional and durable" Dr. Kass stresses.

And while both Dr. Kass and Dr. Miyakawa emphasize that face masks are still the number one priority, headbands are nevertheless a growing need. “Thinking about hair [sounds] frivolous, but if we’re going to [be in this situation] for months, we need to figure out how to *live*,” Dr. Kass adds, pointing out that it’s not just a concern for those who find themselves inside hospitals. “Maybe it means we should all have our hair [pulled back] when we walk around.” For now, she says, “The easiest thing to do is wear a headband.”