RECEPTACLE DEVICE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] Embodiments of the present invention are directed to a receptacle device. More specifically, the present invention relates to a receptacle device for a (facial) mask. The present invention also encompasses a mask assembly comprising a mask and a receptacle device; a method of manufacturing a mask assembly; a method of drinking, feeding or inhaling without unmasking; and use of a mask assembly on a user's face for drinking, feeding or inhaling without unmasking.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present application was filed in January 2021. This is during the time at which the COVID-19 pandemic had forced many governments globally to order their subjects to the confines of their homes in an attempt to minimize contact between humans and slow down the spread of the virus (lockdown). A vital component in combatting the virus was the use of facial masks that were to be worn by people in order to reduce the effects of the virus. In the US, for example, guidelines were provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) on how and why masks should be worn by the general public to safeguard against the virus.

[0003] More specifically, these organizations confirmed that masks are a key measure to suppress transmission and save lives. Masks reduce potential exposure risk from an infected person whether they have symptoms or not. Further, people wearing masks are protected from becoming infected. Furthermore, masks also prevent onward transmission when worn by a person who is infected. The CDC recommended that people wear masks in public settings, involving public and mass transportation, at events and gatherings, and anywhere they will be around other people. The guidelines also stated that people should wear a mask over their nose and mouth and secure it under their chin for optimum protection.

[0004] In the US, as local and federal governments eased the lockdown restrictions, people were again able to begin socializing, albeit in a more limited capacity than normal. People were able to meet at local coffee shops, bars, restaurants and the like, during which they often came into contact with their peers to share a meal or a beverage. One of the exceptions to the rule of wearing a mask in public has been when people are drinking or eating in public, what has commonly become known as "the mask loophole." However, the risk of becoming infected by the virus does not diminish simply because persons are drinking or eating; but since it is difficult or impractical to drink or eat with a mask on, it appears the risk is overlooked or somewhat tolerated. Since March 2020 to January 2021, there have been three waves of increased virus infection rates in the US. Each of these waves have followed a period when lockdown restrictions were eased and people restarted interacting and perhaps not taking the appropriate measures of distancing and protecting themselves and others during social gatherings.

[0005] Clearly there exists a need to protect people during when they are drinking, feeding or inhaling, for example, in a social setting. While some people have opted to temporarily lift their mask away from their mouth region to drink or eat when in a social setting, this practice is both highly inconvenient and unsafe. For instance, it is highly inconvenient because a mask user would need to lift the mask away from their mouth for each sip of beverage or bite of food taken before replacing the mask to its original position. More importantly, this practice is unsafe because the protection afforded by the mask, when lifted away from the mouth region, is negated and the user thus becomes susceptible to infection by the airborne virus owing to nearby persons or if the user touches his/her mouth with his/her potentially virus-infected hands, for example.

[0006] Another technique employed by people to address this problem is to cut a small hole in their mask proximal the mouth region through which they can drink through a straw for instance. However, this technique provides only a marginal, and possibly no, improvement over lifting the mask temporarily since the virus is able to penetrate the mask very easily due to its size. The CDC confirms that research has shown that the particle size of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is around 0.1 micrometer (μm). Thus, a hole of approximately 10mm, for instance, created in a mask provides negligible defense to a user against the virus even when the

hole is housing a straw for example. Additionally, such a hole creates a breach of the mask in the most dangerous place, in the air flow directly in front of the mouth and nose.

[0007] The present invention intends to address and/or at least in part overcome the limitations discussed above by presenting new designs and methods not hitherto contemplated nor possible by known constructions. More particularly, the invention intends to allow a user to wear a mask while drinking, feeding and inhaling while substantially maintaining the integrity/purpose of the mask; particularly the positional integrity of the mask against the face of the user.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a receptacle device for a mask, the receptacle device comprising: a valve; a body portion surrounding the valve; an anchor portion; wherein the body portion and the anchor portion are integrally formed; and wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel is configured to releasably engage the mask.

[0009] According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a receptacle device for a mask, the receptacle device comprising: a valve; a body portion surrounding the valve; and an anchor portion; wherein at least one of the body portion and anchor portion is configured to engage the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements.

[0010] According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a receptacle device for a mask, the receptacle device comprising: a valve; a body portion surrounding the valve; an anchor portion; and a securing portion; wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel is configured to releasably engage the securing portion; and wherein the securing portion is configured to engage the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements.

[0011] One purpose of the present invention is the provision of a receptacle device (i.e. a universal docking system or receptacle) for a mask, such as a facial mask, that allows for various drinking/feeding/inhaling instruments (i.e. inserts, apparatus or connectors) to be inserted and withdrawn easily and frequently through and from the mask, without compromising the positional integrity of the mask. By positional integrity, it should be understood that the position of the mask with respect to the user's face remains substantially unaltered, thus providing superior protection to the user against infection with COVID-19, for instance, compared with known techniques and constructions. More particularly, a straw for drinking a beverage, for example, may be pushed through the receptacle device without the need to remove or shift the mask, while at the same time providing an air-tight or near air-tight seal before, during, and after the act of drinking using the straw. Since the mask remains intact during insertion and removal of drinking/feeding/inhaling instrument from the receptacle device, this prevents any unwanted contaminants from entering the nose or mouth of the user via the edges of the mask.

[0012] The receptacle device thus allows for the operator/user to consume various substances without compromising the integrity, purpose, utility and efficacy of the mask. The primary purpose of the mask is to protect the user from harmful contaminants that may be airborne or may come directly into contact with the user's face via contaminated hands or the like. In this way, the inventors realized that a receptacle device formed according to the present invention affords more constant protection against the inhalation and exhalation of particulate matter (solid and liquid particles) suspended in the air such as but not limited to aerosolized and projectile water droplets containing microbes, pollutants, smoke, toxic fumes, and the like. The air-tight or near air-tight seal helps prevention of air transfer from the outside to the inside of a mask, and vice versa, especially so close to the inhalation and exhalation orifices of the body (mouth and nose), thus reducing the risk of contamination, contagion, and pollution to a minimum.

[0013] As will be discussed further herein, the receptacle device allows for the consumption of various substances that include but are not limited to liquids, foods, gases, and vapors without compromising the integrity of the mask and consequently without compromising the safety of the user in a public setting.

[0014] The receptacle device can be used with any suitable mask. It may be pre-installed or built-in to a mask, or may be distributed as a kit for self-assembly by the end user in a retrofit manner to an existing mask.

[0015] The receptacle device makes it highly convenient for a mask user because it eradicates the need to remove or lift the mask away from their mouth for each sip of beverage or bite of food taken before replacing the mask to its original position, which would otherwise be the case with known methods and constructions discussed above. This is advantageous because it requires less physical and mental energy by the user compared with when using a mask without a receptacle device since the user would have to ensure the mask is replaced to its original and correct position each time a sip of beverage or bite of food is taken. The receptacle device of the present invention in this way largely eliminates user error because the step of removing/shifting the mask is not involved when the receptacle device is used with a mask, for instance. It also provides protection during the period of consumption, wherein otherwise the user would be exposed during the removing/shifting of the mask. Additionally, without a receptacle device, once the user removes the mask, there is a high likelihood that the user will not replace the mask between sips/bites. It often stays off until the entire consumption is finished. In such case, the receptacle device provides significantly increased protection in that the user will keep the mask on.

[0016] In social settings when alcohol is consumed, the ability of a mask user to replace a mask to its original and correct position each time following a sip of alcohol will gradually diminish. It is well documented that drinking alcohol causes the phenomenon of euphoria by increasing the release of dopamine in a subject, which creates a pleasurable sensation. During euphoria, the subject generally feels relaxed, but also experiences impairment of reasoning and memory, and loss of inhibition. The lowered inhibition has been shown to reduce the disciplined practice of behaviors, such as mask usage. It is these effects on the brain which contribute to a mask being improperly worn and used by a user in a social setting when consuming alcohol. Due to the impairment of reasoning and memory, and loss of inhibition, a user may fail to notice that the mask has not been replaced to its correct position; a user may fail to notice that the mask has shifted to an incorrect position on the face allowing contaminants to enter; a user may forget

to replace the mask to its correct position after consuming a sip of alcohol; and a user may lose inhibition of socializing without wearing a mask. As a result, public gatherings involving alcohol consumption have been found to be a contributing factor in the increased virus infection rates seen in the US, at least, where the likelihood of mask misuse increases significantly.

[0017] The receptacle device of the present invention may encourage more people to engage in social settings in the knowledge that this can be done in a safe manner by utilizing the receptacle device to drinking, feed or inhale without unmasking. Encouraging more people to interact is advantageous in that it allows people to leave their homes to engage with their peers; thus preventing or at least reducing the following: back pain and posture issues (sitting for prolonged periods puts a huge stress on back muscles, the neck, and the spine - slouching makes this worse); social isolation has been associated with a significantly increased risk of premature mortality from many causes; risk of developing dementia; risk of incident coronary heart disease; risk for cancer mortality; risk of functional decline; risk of stroke; depression; suicidal ideation; suicide; mental health decline; substance abuse; anxiety disorder and depressive disorder; trauma- and stressor-related disorder (TSRD); and since lockdowns first began at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, advocates for domestic abuse victims have sounded the alarm that calls to stay home could increase cases of intimate partner violence. Use of the receptacle device reduces social isolation to prevent/reduce the above problems.

[0018] The shape of the body portion may be annular, square, circular, triangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal, cylindrical, cubic, elliptical, oval, lip-shaped or a shield.

[0019] The shape of the anchor portion may be annular, square, circular, triangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal, cylindrical, cubic, elliptical, oval, lip-shaped or a shield.

[0020] It may be that body portion and the anchor portion are separate components.

[0021] At least one of the body portion and the anchor portion may be interchangeable. It may be that the interchangeable body portion is attachable to the anchor portion. It may be that the interchangeable anchor portion is attachable to the body portion. The interchangeable body portion may serve the purpose of swapping out or exchanging body portions to adapt to different uses, including but not limited to changing the body portion for a different shape, color, or valve size. The interchangeable anchor portion may serve the purpose of swapping out anchor portions

to adapt to different uses or preferences, including but not limited to changing the anchor for a different shape, color, size or material. This may allow greater versatility for the receptacle device in that a body portion or anchor portion can easily be replaced for reasons of damage thereto or preference of the user, for instance.

[0022] The body portion may be connectable to the anchor portion.

[0023] The body portion may be moveable between a first position and a second position relative to the anchor portion.

[0024] It may be that movement towards the first position causes generation of a substantially hermetic seal between the anchor portion and the body portion, and movement towards the second position causes breaking of the substantially hermetic seal between the anchor portion and the body portion.

[0025] The body portion may be connectable to the anchor portion by screwing thereon.

[0026] It may be that the anchor portion comprises a threaded surface, and the body portion comprises a threaded aperture, and wherein the threaded surface mates with the threaded aperture.

[0027] The body portion may be connectable to the anchor portion by a push-pull connection.

[0028] The body portion may slidably engage the anchor portion.

[0029] The anchor portion may be connected with the body portion through the mask without first creating a hole in the mask. This may provide an easier installation process for the receptacle device, without the need to pre-cut a hole in the mask.

[0030] The body portion and the anchor portion may be integrally formed. This may improve the robustness and structural integrity of the receptacle device.

[0031] The receptacle device may be molded or 3D printed. This may enhance the ease with which the receptacle device is manufactured in terms of time taken and cost of manufacture.

[0032] The receptacle device may be a unitary construction.

[0033] It may be that the valve allows communication between a mask interior and mask exterior.

[0034] The valve may be configured to receive a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument therethrough.

[0035] The drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument may be at least one selected from a straw, a bottle pourer, a spout, a squeeze bottle, a tube, a hose, a nebulizer, a smoking apparatus, an e-cigarette, a vape pen, an inhaler, and a ventilator. Of course, other suitable drinking, feeding or inhalation instruments are also contemplated.

[0036] The valve may be flexible. The flexibility of the valve may allow it to be manipulated during installation, and still retain the integrity of its seal post installation.

[0037] The valve may be elastomeric.

[0038] The elastomeric valve may comprise a material selected from silicone, rubber, a thermoplastic elastomer (TPE), and combinations thereof.

[0039] The valve may comprise a material selected from silicone, plastic, rubber, a thermoplastic elastomer (TPE), and combinations thereof.

[0040] The above characteristics (flexible, elastomeric, material composition) enable the valve to close and open, allowing the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument to push through the valve while providing an air-tight or near air-tight seal. This prevents air transmission through the valve when closed and minimizes air leakage when pushed open.

[0041] It may be that the valve is a self-sealing valve. This automatic prevents unwanted contaminants from entering the mask when using a receptacle device.

[0042] When the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument is withdrawn, the self-sealing valve reforms/folds back to its original position, once again forming a secure seal after use. This self-sealing feature is of high value to the integrity and purpose of the mask, as users may frequently insert and withdraw the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument multiple times during consumption.

[0043] The self-sealing valve may be configured to generate a hermetic seal.

[0044] The valve may be hemispherical. The hemispherical valve may provide several advantages over a flat valve. The hemispherical bowl smoothly funnels/guides the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument towards the valve opening (slits). The angled approach vector provided by the hemispherical bowl may offer less resistance on insertion and may allow a wider

margin of error as the user aims the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument towards the valve opening. This may improve the ease of insertion and withdrawal, and thus the user experience, increasing user adoption and adherence to the present disclosure.

[0045] The valve may be flexibly suspended from the body portion. This may be for dampening a force exerted on the body portion for example or to accommodate variations during insertion. This type of suspended valve may provide several advantages over a standard hemispherical or flat valve. It may protect the valve and seal from external forces: The suspended area between the valve and the body portion may act to dampen the impact from external forces on the body portion, thus protecting the integrity of the valve and maintaining the seal (minimizing air leakage). The suspended valve may also create a better seal during insertion and use of the drinking, feeding, or inhalation instrument. The suspension may allow the valve to slide/shift and better adjust to the position and angle of the drinking, feeding, or inhalation instrument, thus more securely gripping the drinking, feeding, or inhalation instrument. The more secure grip creates a better seal and minimizes air leakage. Embodiments in which the valve is flexibly suspended from the body portion may also provide more freedom of insertion for the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument through the valve. This may encompass, for example, greater degrees of angle, placement, and positioning of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument within or with respect to the valve. It may be that the flexibly suspended valve from the body portion allows the valve to better conform to various insertion angles and placements of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument. This enhanced conformation of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument with respect to the valve may improve the seal generated by the valve with the respective drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument, for example. The suspended valve may also provide an easier withdrawal of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument. The suspension may allow the valve petals to invert upon withdrawal, thus pointing them in the same direction of movement as the drinking, feeding, or inhalation instrument. When the valve petals are pointed in the direction of movement, they offer less resistance and a better user experience during withdrawal.

[0046] The receptacle device may comprise a suspension ridge associated with the body portion, wherein the valve is suspended from the suspension ridge.

[0047] The valve, suspension ridge and body portion may define a space, such as an empty space, therebetween.

[0048] The shape of the valve may be annular, square, circular, triangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal, cylindrical, cubic, elliptical, or oval.

[0049] The valve may be dome-shaped.

[0050] The valve may be convex.

[0051] The valve may be concave.

[0052] The body portion may be flexible. The flexibility of the body portion may allow it to be manipulated through a tight hole in the mask or securing ring during installation, and still retain the integrity of its shape and valve seal post installation.

[0053] The body portion may be rigid.

[0054] It may be that the body portion comprises at least one of a silicone material, plastic composites, a thermoplastic elastomer (TPE), metal, rubber, Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene (ABS), Thermoplastic Polyurethane (TPU), Polylactic Acid (PLA), High Impact Polystyrene (HIPS), Polyethylene terephthalate (PETG), Nylon, Carbon Fiber Filled, Acrylonitrile styrene acrylate (ASA), Polycarbonate, Polypropylene, Metal Filled, Wood Filled, and combinations thereof. Some suitable materials for 3D applications in particular may include **Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene (ABS) -** ABS is a low-cost material, that exhibits excellent properties for printing tough and durable parts that can withstand high temperatures; **Thermoplastic elastomers (TPE) or Thermoplastic Polyurethane (TPU) -** Flexible filaments, commonly referred to as TPE or TPU, exhibit excellent elasticity allowing the material to easily stretch and bend; **Polylactic Acid (PLA) -** PLA is exceptional due to its ease-of-use, dimensional accuracy, and low cost; **High Impact Polystyrene (HIPS) -** HIPS is a lightweight material particularly suitable for use as a dissolvable support structure for ABS models; **Polyethylene terephthalate (PETG) -** PET and PETG filaments are important for their ease of printability, smooth surface finish, and water resistance; **Nylon -** Nylon is a tough and semi-flexible material that offers high impact and abrasion resistance, and makes it an excellent choice for printing durable parts; **Carbon Fiber Filled -** Carbon fiber filaments contain short fibers that are infused into a PLA or ABS base material to help increase strength and stiffness; **Acrylonitrile styrene acrylate (ASA) -** ASA is a useful alternative to ABS

and is particularly suitable for outdoor applications due to its high UV, temperature, and impact resistance; **Polycarbonate -** Polycarbonate has high strength and durability, and has very high heat and impact resistance making it an excellent choice for tough environments; **Polypropylene -** Polypropylene is particularly suitable for high-cycle, low strength applications due to its fatigue resistance, semi-flexible, and lightweight characteristics; **Metal Filled -** Metal filled filaments are made by mixing a fine metal powder into a base material (e.g., PLA) providing a unique metallic finish and added weight; and **Wood Filled -** Wood filaments combine a PLA base material with cork, wood dust, or other derivatives, giving the models a real wooden look and feel.

[0055] The body portion may comprise gripping ridges or notches. The gripping ridges/notches may provide the user an easier surface to locate and hold when inserting or withdrawing the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument. They may also help secure a better grip during the installation process, such as (but not limited to) when connecting the body portion to the anchor portion using a screwing or push-pull connection.

[0056] The gripping ridges/notches may be equidistantly positioned about a perimeter of the body portion.

[0057] The body portion may surround the valve about its perimeter. This may provide an improved seal therewith.

[0058] The valve may comprise a slit pattern. These slits may create valve petals that open upon pressure from the insertion of a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument. The slit pattern may minimize the air gaps around the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument, yet still accommodate various sized drinking, feeding or inhalation instruments.

[0059] The slit pattern may generate valve petals. The petals may flexibly adapt to and apply pressure to the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument, allow the valve to secure a better seal on the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument.

[0060] It may be that the slit pattern comprises dual crosshairs.

[0061] The slit pattern may comprise at least three crosshairs.

[0062] It may be that each of the at least three crosshairs radially extend from a common center and are radially equally spaced.

[0063] It may be that the at least three crosshairs intersect at their respective centers and are radially equally spaced.

[0064] The slit pattern may comprise at least four crosshairs.

[0065] The slit pattern may comprise a snowflake pattern. The snowflake pattern creates additional mini valve petals to better adapt to the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument, creating a better seal and minimizing air gaps.

[0066] The snowflake pattern may comprise at least two crosshairs.

[0067] The slit pattern may be configured to conform to the shape of a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument when inserted through the valve.

[0068] The slit pattern may be configured to releasably grip and hold in position a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument when inserted through the valve.

[0069] In at least some embodiments, the receptacle device comprises an anchor portion. The anchor portion may serve the purpose of anchoring/securing the receptacle device and body portion through the mask, thereby trapping/fitting the mask between the body portion and anchor portion. The anchor portion may also provide a surface for the user's lips to brace against during insertion of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument, making it easier to push the instrument through during insertion and thereby enhancing the user experience.

[0070] The anchor portion may be configured to be substantially flush with the inner surface of the mask. The substantially flush surface may prevent the anchor portion from protruding into the user's mouth. The substantially flush surface may also make it easier for the user's lips to brace against during insertion of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument.

[0071] The anchor portion may comprise at least one of a silicone material, plastic composites, a thermoplastic elastomer (TPE), metal, rubber, Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene (ABS), Thermoplastic Polyurethane (TPU), Polylactic Acid (PLA), High Impact Polystyrene (HIPS), Polyethylene terephthalate (PETG), Nylon, Carbon Fiber Filled, Acrylonitrile styrene acrylate (ASA), Polycarbonate, Polypropylene, Metal Filled, Wood Filled, and combinations thereof.

[0072] The anchor portion may comprise a silicone surface. The silicone may provide a soft surface for the lips to brush and brace against during insertion of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument, thereby improving the user experience.

[0073] The anchor portion may comprise gripping ridges or notches. The gripping ridges/notches may provide a better grip during the installation process, such as, but not limited to, when connecting the body portion to the anchor portion using a screwing or push-pull connection.

[0074] The gripping ridges/notches may be equidistantly positioned about a perimeter of the anchor portion.

[0075] The receptacle device may comprise a securing portion. The securing portion (or in at least some embodiments a securing ring) may sit between the body portion and the outside of the mask, providing pressure between the body portion, mask, and anchor portion. This pressure may create a tighter seal between the body portion, mask, and anchor portion, thereby minimizing air leaks. The securing portion may also allow the receptacle device to fit and securely seal to masks of varying thickness and with various sized and shaped holes, thereby allowing the receptacle device to be retrofitted and work with other masks. It may also allow for masks with imperfect holes (imperfect symmetry and size) to still seal securely with the receptacle device. The securing portion may also provide a grabbable surface for the user during insertion of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument, and may improve the user experience and ease of insertion by providing an easier target for the user to locate the receptacle device's valve opening. The securing portion may also provide a solid structure to be used as an opposable surface; this surface may make it easier for the user's fingers to push against during withdrawal of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument, thereby providing better user ergonomics.

[0076] The body portion may comprise the securing portion.

[0077] The securing portion may be a separate component.

[0078] The securing portion may be configured to engage at least one of the body portion, anchor portion, and mask.

[0079] It may be that the shape of the securing portion is annular, square, circular, triangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal, cylindrical, cubic, elliptical, or oval.

[0080] The securing portion may be rigid.

[0081] The securing portion may comprise at least one of a silicone material, nylon, plastic composites, a thermoplastic elastomer (TPE), metal, rubber, and combinations thereof.

[0082] It may be that the securing portion comprises gripping ridges or notches. The gripping ridges/notches may provide the user an easier surface to locate and hold when inserting or withdrawing the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument. They may also help secure a better grip during the installation process.

[0083] The gripping ridges/notches may be equidistantly positioned about a perimeter of the securing portion.

[0084] The receptacle device may comprise a guide portion. The guide portion may provide a wider berth (entry point) for the user to guide the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument towards the valve opening. This may allow a wider margin of error when the user is inserting the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument.

[0085] The body portion may comprise the guide portion.

[0086] The guide portion may be detachably attachable to the body portion.

[0087] The securing portion may comprise the guide portion.

[0088] The guide portion may be detachably attachable to the securing portion.

[0089] The guide portion may comprise a base and a wall, and wherein the wall tapers towards the base. The tapered wall provides an angled approach vector during insertion, beginning with a wide entry point and smoothly sliding the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument down towards the valve opening.

[0090] It may be that the guide portion comprises a base and a wall, and wherein the wall extends generally orthogonally from the base. The orthogonal wall provides a wider base for the user to locate the receptacle device during insertion of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument.

[0091] The guide portion may comprise a linear or exponential funnel shape.

[0092] The receptacle device may comprise a cap. The cap may serve at least two purposes. It may provide a cover for the receptacle device, providing an additional barrier of protection against air leakage when not actively in use (i.e. when a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument is not being inserted).

[0093] The cap may be a separate component.

[0094] It may be that the cap is configured to engage the body portion.

[0095] The cap may be configured to engage the guide portion.

[0096] The cap may be movable between an open and closed position.

[0097] The valve may be covered when the cap is in the closed position.

[0098] The cap may be connectable to the body portion by screwing thereon, by clipping thereon, by a hinge connection, by a string attachment, by a push-pull connection, or by a magnetic connection.

[0099] It may be that the shape of the cap is disk-shaped, square, circular, triangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal, cylindrical, cubic, elliptical, or oval.

[00100] The cap may comprise an exterior surface for displaying advertising indicia or decoration. The cap may provide a surface for branding, sponsorship, or promotion, including causes that may inspire higher adoption and adherence of the present invention.

[00101] It may be that the securing portion comprises an exterior surface for displaying advertising indicia or decoration. The securing portion may provide a surface for branding, sponsorship, or promotion, including causes that may inspire higher adoption and adherence of the present invention.

[00102] The body portion may comprise an exterior surface for displaying advertising indicia or decoration. The body portion may also provide a surface for branding, sponsorship, or promotion, including causes that may inspire higher adoption and adherence of the present invention.

[00103] In at least some embodiments, the receptacle device may comprise a channel.

[00104] It may be that the shape of the channel substantially matches the shape of at least one of the anchor portion, body portion and securing portion.

[00105] The channel may be a groove.

[00106] The channel may be a disk-shaped space.

[00107] It may be that the shape of the channel is annular, square, circular, triangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal, cylindrical, cubic, elliptical, or oval.

[00108] The mask may be trapped within the channel to generate a substantially hermetic seal.

[00109] The mask may be engaged with at least one of the body portion and anchor portion to generate a substantially hermetic seal.

[00110] The mask may be engaged with the securing portion to generate a substantially hermetic seal. The securing portion may be trapped within the channel to generate a substantially hermetic seal.

[00111] The body portion may be configured to protrude through a hole in the mask.

[00112] The body portion may be configured to protrude through a hole in the securing portion. For example, the receptacle device may engage a mask or securing portion by way of a channel in the form of a groove. More particularly, the body portion may be pushed through a hole in a mask or securing portion so that it protrudes therethrough. The body portion may be flexible/deformable in that its shape can be temporarily changed to more easily fit through the hole in the mask or securing portion. For example, the body portion may be squeezed to help push it through the hole of the mask or securing portion. This provides the benefit of an integrally formed body portion and anchor portion, for instance, of larger diameter to squeeze through a smaller diameter hole of the mask or securing portion, thus allowing the mask or securing portion to be trapped/releasably engaged within the channel between the body portion and anchor portion. This flexibility of the body portion is what allows the integral formation of the body portion and anchor portion to be possible while still maintaining the releasable engagement of the mask or securing portion with the channel. The edges of the hole are thus able to enter and rest in the groove to close the hole of the mask or securing portion. The channel thus engages the mask or securing portion.

[00113] The valve may be alignable with a hole in the mask, allowing the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument to go through the valve and mask hole in a single motion.

[00114] In another aspect, the present invention contemplates a mask assembly comprising a mask and a receptacle device, the receptacle device comprising: a valve; a body portion surrounding the valve; and an anchor portion; wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel releasably engages the mask.

[00115] In another aspect, the present invention contemplates a mask assembly comprising a mask and a receptacle device, the receptacle device comprising: a valve; a body portion

surrounding the valve; and an anchor portion; wherein at least one of the body portion and anchor portion engages the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements.

[00116] In another aspect, the present invention contemplates a mask assembly comprising a mask and a receptacle device, the receptacle device comprising: a valve; a body portion surrounding the valve; an anchor portion; and a securing portion; wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel releasably engages the securing portion; and wherein the securing portion engages the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements.

[00117] Any of the mask assemblies defined herein may comprise any receptacle device defined herein.

[00118] The mask may comprise a material including at least one of polypropylene, polystyrene, polycarbonate, polyethylene, polyester, cotton, linen, silk, wool, nylon, rayon, spandex, and combinations thereof.

[00119] The mask may comprise a filtration barrier for filtering particulate matter.

[00120] The particulate matter may include aerosolized or projectile water droplets containing at least one of microbes, pollutants, smoke, and toxic fumes.

[00121] The mask may comprise a hole alignable with the valve.

[00122] The hole may be positioned on the mask proximal a user's mouth region.

[00123] In another aspect, the present invention encompasses a method of manufacturing a mask assembly, comprising the steps of: providing a mask; providing a receptacle device having a valve, a body portion surrounding the valve, and an anchor portion, wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween; engaging the channel with the mask.

[00124] In another aspect, the present invention encompasses a method of manufacturing a mask assembly, comprising the steps of: providing a mask; providing a receptacle device having a valve, a body portion surrounding the valve, and an anchor portion; engaging at least one of the body portion and anchor portion with the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements.

[00125] In another aspect, the present invention encompasses a method of manufacturing a mask assembly, comprising the steps of: providing a mask; providing a receptacle device having a valve, a body portion surrounding the valve, an anchor portion, and a securing portion, wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween; engaging the channel with the securing portion; engaging the securing portion with the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements.

[00126] In at least some embodiments, it may be that the process of installation is such that an assembler or end user may be able to install the mask assembly onto a mask simply using their hands in under or around three simple steps. The simplicity of install increases user adoption of the present invention.

[00127] Any of the methods defined herein may involve providing any receptacle device defined herein.

[00128] Any of the methods defined herein may comprise the step of piercing a hole through the mask.

[00129] In at least some of the methods defined herein, the body portion and the anchor portion may be integrally formed, and the method may further comprise the step of pushing the body portion through the hole to engage the channel with the mask.

[00130] In at least some of the methods defined herein, the body portion and the anchor portion may be separate components, and the method may further comprise the step of connecting the body portion to the anchor portion, trapping the mask therebetween in the channel to generate a substantially hermetic seal. The step of piercing the hole through the mask may be performed after the mask is trapped in the channel.

[00131] In at least some methods defined herein, the hole may be aligned with the valve.

[00132] Any of the methods defined herein may comprise at least one of the step of providing a securing portion, the step of providing a cap, and the step of providing a guide.

[00133] In at least some methods defined herein, the body portion and the anchor portion may be separate components, and the method may further comprise the step of connecting the body portion to the anchor portion.

[00134] In at least some methods defined herein, the hole may be aligned with at least one of the body portion or anchor portion.

[00135] In at least some methods defined herein, the body portion and the anchor portion may be integrally formed, and the method may further comprise the step of pushing the body portion through the securing portion.

[00136] In at least some methods defined herein, the body portion and the anchor portion may be separate components, and the method may further comprise the step of connecting the body portion to the anchor portion, trapping the securing portion therebetween in the channel to generate a substantially hermetic seal.

[00137] In at least some methods defined herein, the hole may be aligned with the securing portion.

[00138] It may be that at least one of the body portion, anchor portion, securing portion, guide portion and cap are generated by at least one of injection molding, cast molding, 3D printing, and stamping.

[00139] In another aspect, the present invention envisages a method of drinking, feeding or inhaling without unmasking, comprising the steps of: providing a mask assembly comprising a mask and a receptacle device, the receptacle device comprising a valve, a body portion surrounding the valve, and an anchor portion, wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel releasably engages the mask, and piercing a hole through the mask in line with the valve; releasably attaching the mask assembly to at least partially cover the face of a user; inserting a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument through the valve to the user's mouth when the user is drinking, feeding or inhaling through the valve; and removing the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument from the valve and user's mouth when the user is not drinking, feeding or inhaling through the valve.

[00140] The method may comprise the step of providing a securing portion for engaging with the body portion.

[00141] In another aspect, the present invention envisages a method of drinking, feeding or inhaling without unmasking, comprising the steps of: providing a mask assembly comprising a mask and a receptacle device, the receptacle device comprising a valve, a body portion

surrounding the valve, and an anchor portion, wherein at least one of the body portion and anchor portion engages the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements, and piercing a hole through the mask in line with at least one of the body portion, the anchor portion and the valve; releasably attaching the mask assembly to at least partially cover the face of a user; inserting a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument through the valve to the user's mouth when the user is drinking, feeding or inhaling through the valve; and removing the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument from the valve and user's mouth when the user is not drinking, feeding or inhaling through the valve.

[00142] In another aspect, the present invention envisages a method of drinking, feeding or inhaling without unmasking, comprising the steps of: providing a mask assembly comprising a mask and a receptacle device, the receptacle device comprising a valve, a body portion surrounding the valve, an anchor portion, and a securing portion, wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel releasably engages the securing portion, the securing portion engages the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements, and piercing a hole through the mask in line with at least one of the securing portion and the valve; releasably attaching the mask assembly to at least partially cover the face of a user; inserting a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument through the valve to the user's mouth when the user is drinking, feeding or inhaling through the valve; and removing the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument from the valve and user's mouth when the user is not drinking, feeding or inhaling through the valve.

[00143] Any of the methods defined herein may involve any mask assembly defined herein.

[00144] Any of the methods defined herein may comprise the step of providing a guide portion for detachably attaching to the body portion or securing portion, wherein the guide portion guides the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument when being inserted through the valve.

[00145] Any of the methods defined herein may comprise the step of providing a cap for covering the valve when the user is not drinking, feeding or inhaling through the valve.

[00146] In another aspect, the present invention comprehends the use of a mask assembly on a user's face for drinking, feeding or inhaling without unmasking, the mask assembly comprising

a mask and a receptacle device, the receptacle device comprising a valve, a body portion surrounding the valve, and an anchor portion, wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel releasably engages the mask, and wherein the valve is configured for receiving a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument.

[00147] In another aspect, the present invention comprehends the use of a mask assembly on a user's face for drinking, feeding or inhaling without unmasking, the mask assembly comprising a mask and a receptacle device, the receptacle device comprising a valve, a body portion surrounding the valve, and an anchor portion, wherein at least one of the body portion and anchor portion engages the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements, and wherein the valve is configured for receiving a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument.

[00148] In another aspect, the present invention comprehends the use of a mask assembly on a user's face for drinking, feeding or inhaling without unmasking, the mask assembly comprising a mask and a receptacle device, the receptacle device comprising a valve, a body portion surrounding the valve, an anchor portion, and a securing portion, wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel releasably engages the securing portion, wherein the securing portion engages the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements,, and wherein the valve is configured for receiving a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument.

[00149] Any of the uses defined herein may involve any mask assembly defined herein.

[00150] In another aspect, the present invention contemplates the use of any receptacle device defined herein for retrofitting to a mask.

[00151] In another aspect, the present invention envisages a method of creating a hole in a mask for engaging a receptacle device with the mask, the method comprising the steps of: providing a mask; providing a receptacle device for a mask, the receptacle device comprising a valve; a body portion surrounding the valve; and an anchor portion; wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel is configured to releasably engage the mask; providing a piercing tool comprising a longitudinal body and tip portion, wherein the width of the longitudinal body is substantially the same as the width of the channel;

piercing the mask with the tip portion; and passing the longitudinal body through the mask to define a hole configured for releasably engaging the receptacle device with the mask.

[00152] The process of piercing this hole is such that an assembler or end user may be able to do so using no additional tools, and may do so within seconds for example. The simplicity of install increases user adoption of the present invention.

[00153] The method may involve providing any receptacle device defined herein.

[00154] It will be appreciated that the features disclosed herein in aspects and embodiments of the receptacle devices, assemblies, and methods can be used interchangeably with other aspect and embodiments without departing from the scope of the invention. The inventors contemplated such features being equally applicable in different embodiments to which they are shown or in the drawings, for example.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[00155] These and other aspects and features of the present invention will become apparent to those ordinarily skilled in the art upon review of the following description of specific embodiments of the invention in conjunction with the accompanying figures, in which:

[00156] FIG. **1** is a schematic front view of a user wearing a mask bearing a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

[00157] FIG. **2** is a perspective exploded view of a mask and receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

[00158] FIG. **3a** is an exterior perspective assembled view of the mask and receptacle device of FIG. **2** receiving a drinking instrument;

[00159] FIG. **3b** is an interior perspective assembled view of the mask and receptacle device of FIG. **2** receiving a drinking instrument;

[00160] FIG. **4a** is a plan view of a valve closed position of a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

[00161] FIG. **4b** is a cross sectional side view through A-A of the valve closed position of FIG. **4a**;

[00162] FIG. **5a** is a plan view of the valve open position of the receptacle device of FIG. **4a**;

[00163] FIG. **5b** is a cross sectional side view through B-B of the valve open position of FIG. **5a**;

[00164] FIG. **6a** is the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **4b** of the receptacle device in operation guiding a drinking instrument;

[00165] FIG. **6b** is the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **5b** of the receptacle device in operation receiving a drinking instrument;

[00166] FIG. **7a** is a perspective view of a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising a hemispherical valve;

[00167] FIG. **7b** is a side view of the receptacle device of FIG. **7a**;

[00168] FIG. **7c** is a side view of the receptacle device of FIG. **7a** outlining the position of the valve;

[00169] FIG. **7d** is a plan view of the receptacle device of FIG. **7a**;

[00170] FIG. **7e** is a bottom view of the receptacle device of FIG. **7a**;

[00171] FIG. **7f** is a cross-sectional side view through C-C of the valve closed position of FIG. **7d**;

[00172] FIG. **7g** is the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **7f** following an application of force on the body portion;

[00173] FIG. **8a** is a perspective view of a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising a suspension valve;

[00174] FIG. **8b** is a side view of the receptacle device of FIG. **8a**;

[00175] FIG. **8c** is a side view of the receptacle device of FIG. **8a** outlining the position of the valve;

[00176] FIG. **8d** is a plan view of the receptacle device of FIG. **8a**;

[00177] FIG. **8e** is a bottom view of the receptacle device of FIG. **8a**;

[00178] FIG. **8f** is a cross-sectional side view through D-D of the valve closed position of FIG. **8d**;

[00179] FIG. **8g** is the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **8f** following an application of force on the body portion;

[00180] FIG. **8h** is the cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device comprising a suspension valve in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

[00181] FIG. **9a** is a plan view of a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising a hemispherical valve in operation receiving a drinking instrument;

[00182] FIG. **9b** is a cross-sectional side view through H-H of the receptacle device in operation of FIG. **9a**;

[00183] FIG. **10a** is a plan view of a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising a suspension valve in operation receiving a drinking instrument;

[00184] FIG. **10b** is a cross-sectional side view through I-I of the receptacle device in operation of FIG. **10a**;

[00185] FIG. **11a** is a perspective view of a receptacle device and a mask in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device is a unitary construction;

[00186] FIG. **11b** is the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **11a** following assembly of the receptacle device and the mask;

[00187] FIG. **11c** is a perspective view of a receptacle device and a mask in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device comprises a body portion and anchor portion which are separate components;

[00188] FIG. **11d** is the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **11c** following assembly of the receptacle device and the mask;

[00189] FIG. **11e** is the cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device similar to that shown in FIGS. **11b** and **11d** but comprising a securing portion;

[00190] FIG. **12a** is a perspective view of a receptacle device and a mask engaging a securing portion in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device is a unitary construction;

[00191] FIG. **12b** is a perspective view of a receptacle device and a mask engaging a securing portion in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device comprises a body portion and anchor portion which are separate components;

[00192] FIG. **12c** is a cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device and a mask according to an embodiment of the invention engaging a securing portion in a first configuration;

[00193] FIG. **12d** is a cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device and a mask according to an embodiment of the invention engaging a securing portion in a second configuration;

[00194] FIG. **12e** is a cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device and a mask according to an embodiment of the invention engaging a securing portion in a third configuration;

[00195] FIG. **13a** is a perspective view of a receptacle device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention comprising a hemispherical valve and an anchor portion engaged with a mask, and in which the receptacle device is a unitary construction;

[00196] FIG. **13b** is a cross-sectional side view through E-E of the mask assembly shown in FIG. **9a**;

[00197] FIG. **13c** is a cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device similar to that shown in FIG. **13b** but in a second configuration;

[00198] FIG. **13d** is a cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device similar to that shown in FIG. **13b** but in a third configuration;

[00199] FIG. **13e** is a perspective view of a receptacle device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention comprising a hemispherical valve and a body portion engaged with a mask, and in which the receptacle device is a unitary construction;

[00200] FIG. **13f** is a cross-sectional side view through F-F of the mask assembly shown in FIG. **13e**;

[00201] FIG. **13g** is a perspective view of a receptacle device similar to that shown in FIG. **13e** but in a second configuration;

[00202] FIG. **13h** is a cross-sectional side view through G-G of the mask assembly shown in FIG. **13g**;

[00203] FIG. **13i** is a perspective view of a receptacle device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention comprising a hemispherical valve and engaged with a mask, and in which the receptacle device is a unitary construction almost flush with the mask;

[00204] FIG. **13j** is a cross-sectional side view through H-H of the mask assembly shown in FIG. **13i**;

[00205] FIG. **13k** is a perspective view of a receptacle device similar to that shown in FIG. **13i** but in a second configuration in which a unitary body engages the exterior face of the mask;

[00206] FIG. **13l** is a cross-sectional side view through I-I of the mask assembly shown in FIG. **13k**;

[00207] FIG. **13m** is a perspective view of a receptacle device similar to that shown in FIG. **13i** but in a third configuration in which a unitary body engages the interior face of the mask;

[00208] FIG. **13n** is a cross-sectional side view through J-J of the mask assembly shown in FIG. **13m**;

[00209] FIG. **14a** is a perspective view of a receptacle device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device comprises a body portion and anchor portion which are separate components, and the anchor portion engages a mask;

[00210] FIG. **14b** is a perspective view of a receptacle device similar to that shown in FIG. **14a** but with another embodiment of the anchor portion;

[00211] FIG. **14c** is a cross-sectional side view of the mask assembly shown in FIG. **14a** in which the anchor portion engages the mask in a first configuration;

[00212] FIG. **14d** is a cross-sectional side view of the mask assembly shown in FIG. **14a** in which the anchor portion engages the mask in a second configuration;

[00213] FIG. **14e** is a cross-sectional side view of the mask assembly shown in FIG. **14a** in which the anchor portion engages the mask in a third configuration;

[00214] FIG. **15a** is a perspective view of a receptacle device and mask in accordance with another embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device comprises a body portion and anchor portion which are separate components, and the body portion engages a mask;

[00215] FIG. **15b** is a perspective view of a receptacle device similar to that shown in FIG. **15a** but with another embodiment of the anchor portion;

[00216] FIG. **15c** is a cross-sectional side view of the mask assembly shown in FIG.**15a** in which the body portion engages the mask in a first configuration;

[00217] FIG. **15d** is a cross-sectional side view of the mask assembly shown in FIG.**15a** in which the body portion engages the mask in a second configuration;

[00218] FIG. **15e** is a cross-sectional side view of the mask assembly shown in FIG.**15a** in which the body portion engages the mask in a third configuration;

[00219] FIG. **15f** is a cross-sectional side view of the mask assembly shown in FIG.**15a** in which the body portion engages the mask in a fourth configuration;

[00220] FIG. **16** is a perspective exploded view of a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising a body portion and anchor portion which are separate components utilizing a push-pull mechanism for connection;

[00221] FIG. **17** is a perspective exploded view of a receptacle device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention comprising a body portion and anchor portion which are separate components utilizing a screw-fit mechanism for connection;

[00222] FIG. **18** is a perspective exploded view of a receptacle device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention comprising a body portion and valve which are separate components;

[00223] FIGS. **19a** to **19e** are plan views of various valve slit patterns in accordance with embodiments of the invention;

[00224] FIGS. **20a** to **20d** are side views of various valve arrangements relative to the body portion in accordance with embodiments of the invention;

[00225] FIGS. **21a** to **21d** are side views of various guide portion arrangements relative to the body portion in accordance with embodiments of the invention;

[00226] FIG. **22** is a perspective view of a cap in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

[00227] FIG. **23** is a collection of side and perspective views of various shapes of a body portion, anchor portion, securing portion and/or cap in accordance with embodiments of the invention;

[00228] FIG. **24a** is a perspective view of a body portion in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping ridges;

[00229] FIG. **24b** is a perspective view of an anchor portion in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping ridges;

[00230] FIG. **25a** is a perspective view of a body portion in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping notches;

[00231] FIG. **25b** is a perspective view of a securing portion in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping notches;

[00232] FIG. **25c** is a perspective view of an anchor portion in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping notches;

[00233] FIG. **25d** is a perspective view of an anchor portion in accordance with another embodiment of the invention comprising gripping notches;

[00234] FIG. **26a** is a perspective view of a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in operation receiving a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument;

[00235] FIG. **26b** is a perspective view of a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in operation receiving an adapter; and

[00236] FIG. **26c** is a perspective view of a receptacle device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in operation receiving a tube/hose.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[00237] Embodiments of the present invention will now be described in detail with reference to the drawings, which are provided as illustrative examples of the invention so as to enable those skilled in the art to practice the invention. Notably, the figures and examples below are not meant to limit the scope of the present invention to a single embodiment, but other embodiments are possible by way of interchange of some or all of the described or illustrated elements. Moreover, where certain elements of the present invention can be partially or fully implemented using known components, only those portions of such known components that are necessary for an understanding of the present invention will be described, and detailed descriptions of other portions of such known components will be omitted so as not to obscure

the invention. In the present specification, an embodiment showing a singular component should not be considered limiting; rather, the invention is intended to encompass other embodiments including a plurality of the same component, and vice-versa, unless explicitly stated otherwise herein. Moreover, applicants do not intend for any term in the specification or claims to be ascribed an uncommon or special meaning unless explicitly set forth as such. Further, the present invention encompasses present and future known equivalents to the known components referred to herein by way of illustration. Throughout this specification like reference numerals are used to denote like parts.

[00238] Referring to FIG. **1**, there is shown a schematic front view of a user's face **101** wearing a mask **103** bearing a receptacle device **105** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. In this embodiment, the mask **103** is made from a polypropylene material, but it will be appreciated that any suitable mask, for example, including a material of at least one of polycarbonate, polyethylene, polyester, cotton, linen, silk, wool, nylon, rayon, spandex, and combinations thereof could be used in conjunction with the receptacle device **105**. FIG. **1** thus depicts a mask assembly generally indicated **107** formed in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[00239] In this embodiment, the mask **103** has a trapezium shape which is positioned over the user's face **101** such that the mouth and nose (not shown) are covered. It will be appreciated that the mask may have any suitable shape to allow it fit over and ideally match the shape of a user's face, for instance. For example, the mask can be any shape and is most often rectangular (e.g., surgical mask). The receptacle device **105** is releasably engaged with the mask **103** and positioned near the user's mouth region (not shown) and is shown receiving a drinking instrument, which in this embodiment is a straw **109**. It will be appreciated that the receptacle device **105** is configured to receive any of a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument which may be at least one selected from a straw, bottle pourer, a spout, a squeeze bottle, a tube, a hose, a nebulizer, a smoking apparatus, an e-cigarette, a vape pen, an inhaler, and a ventilator, for instance. The straw **109** protrudes from the receptacle device **105** at a downward angle to provide maximum comfort to the user.

[00240] The receptacle device **105** (i.e., a universal docking system or receptacle) for the mask **103** allows for various drinking/feeding/inhaling instruments (i.e., inserts, apparatus or connectors) to be inserted and withdrawn easily and frequently through and from the mask **103**, without compromising the positional integrity of the mask **103** with respect to the user's face **101**. Thus, the position of the mask **103** with respect to the user's face **101** remains substantially unaltered, thus providing superior protection to the user against infection with COVID-19, for instance, compared with known techniques and constructions. More particularly, the straw **109** for drinking a beverage (not shown), for example, can be pushed through the receptacle device **105** without the need to remove or shift the mask **103**, while at the same time providing an air-tight or near air-tight seal before, during, and after the act of drinking using the straw **109**. Since the mask **103** remains intact during insertion and removal of the straw **109** from the receptacle device **105**, this prevents any unwanted contaminants from entering the nose or mouth of the user via the edges of the mask **103**.

[00241] The receptacle device **105** thus allows for the operator/user to consume various substances without compromising the integrity, purpose, utility and efficacy of the mask **103**. The primary purpose of the mask **103** is to protect the user from harmful contaminants that may be airborne or may come directly into contact with the user's face **101** via contaminated hands or the like. In this way, the inventors realized that a receptacle device **105** formed according to the present invention affords more constant protection against the inhalation and exhalation of particulate matter (solid and liquid particles) suspended in the air such as but not limited to aerosolized and projectile water droplets containing microbes, pollutants, smoke, toxic fumes, and the like (not shown). The air-tight or near air-tight seal helps prevention of air transfer from the outside to the inside of a mask **103**, and vice versa, especially so close to the inhalation and exhalation orifices of the body (mouth and nose), thus reducing the risk of contamination, contagion, and pollution to a minimum.

[00242] The receptacle device **105** makes it highly convenient for a mask user because it eradicates the need to lift the mask **103** away from their mouth for each sip of beverage or bite of food taken before replacing the mask to its original position, which would otherwise be the case with known methods and constructions discussed above. This is advantageous because it

requires less physical and mental energy by the user compared with when using a mask without a receptacle device **105** since the user would have to ensure the mask is replaced to its original and correct position each time a sip of beverage or bite of food is taken. The receptacle device **105** of the present invention in this way largely eliminates user error because the step of removing/shifting the mask **103** is not involved when the receptacle device **105** is used with the mask **103**.

[00243] In social settings when alcohol is consumed, the ability of a mask user to replace a mask to its original and correct position each time following a sip of alcohol will gradually diminish. It is well documented that drinking alcohol causes the phenomenon of euphoria by increasing the release of dopamine in a subject, which creates a pleasurable sensation. During euphoria, the subject generally feels relaxed, but also experiences impairment of reasoning and memory, and loss of inhibition. It is these effects on the brain which contribute to a mask being improperly worn and used by a user in a social setting when consuming alcohol. Due to the impairment of reasoning and memory, and loss of inhibition, a user may fail to notice that the mask has not been replaced to its correct position; a user may fail to notice that the mask has shifted to an incorrect position on the face allowing contaminants to enter; a user may forget to replace the mask to its correct position after consuming a sip of alcohol; and a user may lose inhibition of socializing without wearing a mask. As a result, public gatherings involving alcohol consumption have been found to be a contributing factor in the increased virus infection rates seen in the US, at least, where the likelihood of mask misuse and non-use increases significantly.

[00244] The receptacle device **105** of the present invention can encourage more people to engage in social settings in the knowledge that this can be done in a safe manner by utilizing the receptacle device **105** to drink, feed or inhale without unmasking. Encouraging more people to interact is advantageous in that it allows people to leave their homes to engage with their peers; thus preventing or at least reducing the following: back pain and posture issues (sitting for prolonged periods puts a huge stress on back muscles, the neck, and the spine - slouching makes this worse); social isolation has been associated with a significantly increased risk of premature mortality from many causes; risk of developing dementia; risk of incident coronary heart disease; risk for cancer mortality; risk of functional decline; risk of stroke; depression; suicidal ideation;

suicide; mental health decline; substance abuse; anxiety disorder and depressive disorder; trauma- and stressor-related disorder (TSRD); and since lockdowns first began at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, advocates for domestic abuse victims have sounded the alarm that calls to stay home could increase cases of intimate partner violence. Use of the receptacle device **105** reduces social isolation to prevent/reduce the above problems.

[00245] Referring now to FIG. **2**, there is shown a perspective exploded view of a mask **203** and receptacle device generally indicated **205** formed in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, the mask **203** is a rectangular sheet of an electrostatic non-woven polypropylene fiber comprising a hole **211** at its center. In this embodiment, the receptacle device **205** comprises a valve **213**, a body portion **215** surrounding the valve **213**, an anchor portion **217**, a securing portion **219** and a cap **221**, wherein the anchor portion **217** and the body portion **215** define a channel **223** therebetween, and the channel **223** is configured to releasably engage the mask **203**. It will be understood that the channel 223 may alternatively or additionally be located between the securing portion **219** and the mask **203**, for instance, or between the securing portion **219** and mask **203**, for instance, or between the and mask **203** and anchor portion **217** for instance.

[00246] It will be appreciated that the securing portion **219** and the cap **221** are not essential for the present invention to operate, but do offer advantages in combination with the other features of the invention over known methods and constructions. In this embodiment, the channel **223** has an annular shape, but it will be appreciated that in other embodiments the shape of the channel may substantially match the shape of at least one of the anchor portion, body portion and securing portion, or the shape of the channel may be a groove, a disk-shaped space, circular, triangular, pentagonal, hexagonal, octagonal, cylindrical, cubic, elliptical, or oval.

[00247] The body portion **215** is a short cylinder **231** with a hole **225** through its center. At the top **233** of the short cylinder **331** is located the valve **213**. In this way, the body portion **215**, by way of the hole **225** housing the valve **213**, surrounds the valve **213**. The valve **213** is half-domed shaped or hemispherical and comprises a slit pattern **235** in the form of two crosshairs **237** that intersect at their centers. The valve **213** shown in FIG. **2** is concave, as viewed from outside the mask. It will be appreciated the valve **213** may be concave or convex in other embodiments.

[00248] The cap **221** is disk-shaped and has substantially the same diameter as that of the top **233** of the body portion **215**, such that in operation the cap **221** is able to cover the top **233** and consequently the valve **213** surrounded by the body portion **215**. In this embodiment, the securing portion **219** is a ring **239** comprising a hole **241** at its center. In this embodiment, the anchor portion is also a ring **243** comprising a hole **245**. The diameter of the securing portion **219** and the anchor portion **217** is the same in this embodiment, which diameter is approximately 50% greater, in this embodiment, than that of the body portion **215** and cap **221**.

[00249] The mask **203** defines a partition **247** which can be seen as an exterior (exposed to airborne contaminants) and interior (protected from airborne contaminants). The exterior and interior regions are shown in FIG. **2**. It will be understood that, in operation, the interior surface **249** of the mask **203** faces towards the user's face (not shown). In the same way, the exterior surface **251** of the mask **203** faces away from the user's face. The mask **203**, therefore, protects the user from COVID-19 and the like.

[00250] When the receptacle device **205** is assembled, the respective holes **225**, **241**, **211**, and **245** are aligned. More particularly, the body portion **215** is releasably connected to the anchor portion **217** by snap-fitting thereon (but could be screwed on or have a push-pull connection), and concurrently engaging the mask **203** in the channel **223** formed from said connection of the body portion **215** and anchor portion **217**. To this end, the hole **211** is substantially hermetically sealed by the valve **213** which is aligned with the hole **211**.

[00251] In this environment, the components shown - the cap **221**, the body portion **215**, the securing portion **219**, and the anchor portion **217** are all separate components, but it will be understood that in other embodiments at least some of these components maybe integrally formed. For instance, the anchor portion and body portion maybe integrally formed, or the body portion may comprise the securing portion, or the receptacle device may be a unitary construction. The receptacle device **205** can be used with any suitable mask. It may be pre-installed or built into a mask, or may be distributed as a kit for self-assembly by the end user in a retrofit manner to an existing mask.

[00252] Referring now to FIG. **3a**, there is shown an exterior perspective assembled view of the mask and receptacle device of FIG. **2** receiving a drinking instrument in the form of a straw

209. Here, the straw **209** is shown protruding through the valve **213** to the interior of the mask **203** such that a user could drink through the straw **209** while still being protected from any contaminants that may exist at the exterior of the mask **203**. In this embodiment, the hole **225** of the body portion **215**, hole **241** of the securing portion **219**, hole **211** of the mask **203** and hole **245** of the anchor portion **245** are concentrically aligned. The straw **209** takes a path through the valve **215**, and holes **241**, **211** and **245** to enter the interior space of the mask **203**. In this way, any drinking, feeding, or inhaling instrument can communicate between the interior and exterior of the mask **203**. The interior of the mask **203** showing the protruding straw **209** therethrough is best seen in FIG. **3b** which is an interior perspective assembled view of the mask **203** and receptacle device **205** of FIG. **2**. In this perspective, the straw **209** enters the interior space of the mask **203** through the hole **211** of the mask **203** and hole **245** of the anchor portion **217**.

[00253] Referring now to FIG. **4a**, there is shown a plan view of the valve **213** in a closed position and FIG. **4b** is a cross sectional side view through A-A of the valve **213** in the closed position of FIG. **4a**. The valve **213** and the body portion **215** are both circular when seen in the plan view of FIG. **4a**. In the cross-sectional view of FIG. **4b**, it can be seen that the valve **213** has a hemispherical shape. The slit pattern **235** comprises two crosshairs **237** defining four opposing valve petals **253** which can be flexed to allow entry and removal of a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument such as a straw, for example. In the closed position, the valve petals **253** adjoin to form a substantially hermetic seal. This may be considered an airtight seal, for example. By contrast, in the open valve position shown in FIGS. **5a** and **5b**, the valve petals **253** bend away from each other and do not adjoin, causing the slit pattern **235** to open up to define a four-cornered star shape when seen in the plan view of FIG. **5a**.

[00254] Referring now to FIG. **6a** there is shown the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **4b** of the receptacle device in operation guiding a drinking instrument in the form of a straw **209**. It will be appreciated that the receptacle device may receive any suitable drinking, feeding, or inhaling instrument in the same manner as that described in respect of the straw **209**. Owing to its hemispherical shape in this embodiment, the valve **213** is able to guide the end **255** of the straw **209** along the exterior curved surface **257** of the valve **213** towards the center where the crosshairs **237** intersect, at which intersection **262** the valve **213** requires the least force to be

penetrated by the straw **209**. Additionally, the angled approach vector of the straw **209** as guided by the curved surface **257** of the valve **213** offers reduced resistance on entry and a wider margin of error for the purposes of the user. FIG. **6b** shows the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **5b** of the receptacle device **205** in operation in which the valve **213** is receiving the straw **209**. The force applied to the slit pattern **235** by the straw **209** causes the valve petals **253** to deform thereby allowing entry of the straw **209** through the valve **213** and into the interior of the mask **203**. In this way, the valve petals **253** conform to the shape of the straw **209** to generate a substantial seal between the valve **213** and the straw **209**, thereby minimizing any potentially harmful contaminants from entering the interior region of the mask **203**.

[00255] Referring now to FIG. **7a** there is shown a perspective view of a receptacle device **705** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising a hemispherical valve **713**. The body portion **715** is a short cylinder **731** of circular cross section with a hole **725** through its center. As with other embodiments, it will be understood that the cross-section of the short cylinder **731** need not be circular; for instance it could be square or triangular or any shape defined herein. At the top **733** of the short cylinder **731** is located the hemispherical valve **713**. In this way, the body portion **715**, by way of the hole **725** housing the hemispherical valve **713**, surrounds the hemispherical valve **713**. The hemispherical valve **713** comprises a slit pattern **735** in the form of two crosshairs **737** that intersect at their centers. In this embodiment, the anchor portion **717** is an annulus **743** comprising a hole **745** (best seen in FIG. **7f**).

[00256] The diameter of the anchor portion **717** is, in this embodiment, approximately 50% greater than that of the body portion **715**. In this embodiment, the receptacle device **705** is a unitary construction. In this embodiment, the body portion **715** is integrally formed with the anchor portion **717** by way of a bridge portion **761**. The bridge portion **761** is part of the body portion **715** and defines an annular shape that has a slightly smaller diameter than the body portion **715**. Due to the bridge portion **761**, there is defined a channel which is operable to releasably engage a suitable mask. In this embodiment, therefore, the channel **723** is in the form of a groove **723**. It can, therefore, be said that the anchor portion **717** and the body portion **715** define a channel **723** therebetween, and the channel **723** is configured to releasably engage a mask. The holes **725** and **745** and valve **713** delineate a path for receiving a drinking, feeding or

inhaling instrument (not shown). It will be appreciated, however, that the hemispherical valve employed in this environment could be utilised in other embodiments which may not be a unitary construction, for example, and could have the same effect as that of this embodiment.

[00257] In this embodiment, for example, the receptacle device **705** engages a mask (not shown) or securing portion (not shown) by way of the channel **723** in the form of a groove **723**. More particularly, the body portion **715** can be pushed through a hole (not shown) in a mask (not shown) or securing portion (not shown) so that it protrudes therethrough. The body portion **715** may be flexible/deformable in that its shape can be temporarily changed to more easily fit through the hole in the mask or securing portion. For example, the body portion **715** may be squeezed to help push it through the hole of the mask or securing portion. This provides the benefit of an integrally formed body portion **715** and anchor portion **717** of larger diameter to squeeze through a smaller diameter hole of the mask or securing portion, thus allowing the mask or securing portion to be trapped/releasably engaged within the channel **723** between the body portion **715** and anchor portion **717**. This flexibility of the body portion **715** is what allows the integral formation of the body portion **715** and anchor portion **717** to be possible while still maintaining the releasable engagement of the mask or securing portion with the channel **723**. The edges of the hole (not shown) are thus able to enter and rest in the groove **723** to close the hole (not shown) of the mask (not shown) or securing portion (not shown). The channel **723** thus engages the mask (not shown) or securing portion (not shown).

[00258] Referring to FIG. **7b**, there is shown a side view of the receptacle device of FIG. **7a**. FIG. **7c** is the same as FIG. **7b** except that it provides a hemispherical outline **763** of the position of the valve **713** with respect to the body portion **715**.

[00259] Referring now to FIG. **7d**, there is shown a plan view of the receptacle device of FIG. **7a**. The hemispherical valve **713** is shown in the closed position and shown recessed with respect to the plane of the body portion **715**. In this embodiment, the hemispherical valve **713** and the body portion **715** are both circular when seen in the plan view of FIG. **7d**. The crosshairs **737** define four opposing valve petals **753** which can be flexed to allow entry and removal of a drinking, feeding or inhaling instrument (not shown), for instance. In this closed position, the

valve petals **753** adjoin to form a substantially hermetic seal. The difference in diameter between the body portion **715** and the anchor portion **717** is clearly visible in FIG. **7d**.

[00260] Referring now to FIG. **7e**, there is shown a bottom view from the underside (relative to the arrangement shown in FIGS. **7a** to **7c**) of the receptacle device of FIG. **7a**. The hemispherical valve **713** can be seen through the hole **745** of the annulus **743**, the valve **713** being in the closed position and shown protruding outwardly with respect to the plane of the body portion **715**.

[00261] Referring now to FIG. **7f**, there is shown a cross sectional side view through C-C of the hemispherical valve **713** in the closed position of FIG. **7d**. The curved surface **757** of the hemispherical valve **713** is clearly seen in FIG. **7f**. In the same way, the configuration of the body portion **715** surrounding the hemispherical valve **713** and extending perpendicularly from the anchor portion **717** is also visible in FIG. **7f**. The body portion **715** offers the advantage of allowing a user to grip it to hold the receptacle device **705** in position while a drinking, feeding, or inhaling instrument is inserted or withdrawn through/from the hemispherical valve **713** so that the accompanying mask is not displaced from against the user's face.

[00262] Referring now to FIG. **7g**, there is shown the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **7f** following an application of force **765** on the body portion **715**. With respect to the orientation of the page, it can be seen that the external force indicated by arrow **765** is applied laterally against the body portion **715**. The effect of the external force **765** is to squeeze the body portion **715** inwardly by a distance indicated **766** thereby causing the hemispherical valve **713** to slightly flex its valve petals **753** such that a small gap **767** appears at the intersection **762** of the hemispherical valve **713**; hence, the hermetic seal is slightly disrupted by the application of the external **765** on the body portion **715**. This should be contrasted with the same external force being applied to the receptacle device **805** shown in FIG. **8g**, for example.

[00263] Referring now to FIG. **8a** there is shown a perspective view of a receptacle device **805** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising a suspension valve **813** suspended from a suspension ridge **869**. The body potion **815** and anchor portion **843** of the receptacle device **805** are generally the same as the body portion **715** and anchor portion **743**. Other similar features are thus indicated by like referenced numerals. Accordingly, FIG. **8b** shows a side view of the receptacle device of FIG. **8a**, and FIG. **8c** shows a side view of the receptacle

device of FIG. **8a** providing a hemispherical outline **863** of the position of the suspension valve **813**. The primary difference of the embodiment of FIG. **8a** to **8g** compared with the embodiment of FIG. **7a** to **7g** is the valve **813** being a suspension valve **813** suspended from a suspension ridge **869**.

[00264] Referring now to FIG. **8d**, there is shown a plan view of the receptacle device of FIG. **8a**. The suspension valve **813** is shown in the closed position and shown recessed with respect to the plane of the body portion **815**. In this embodiment, the suspension valve **813** and the body portion **815** are both circular when seen in the plan view of FIG. **8d**. The crosshairs **837** define four opposing valve petals **853** which can be flexed to allow entry and removal of a drinking, feeding or inhaling instrument (not shown), for instance. In this closed position, the valve petals **853** adjoin to form a substantially hermetic seal. The difference in diameter between the body portion **815** and the anchor portion **817** is clearly visible in FIG. **8d**, which difference is the anchor portion **817** is, in this embodiment, approximately 50% greater in diameter than the body portion **815**. The suspension valve **813** is flexibly suspended from the body portion **815** for dampening an external force **865** (best seen in FIG. **8g**) exerted on the body portion **815**. In this embodiment, the receptacle device **805** comprises a suspension ridge **869** which is associated with the body portion **815**, wherein the suspension valve **813** is suspended from the suspension ridge **869**. Since the suspension valve **813** is flexibly suspended from the body portion **815**, this may also provide more freedom of insertion for a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument through the suspension valve **813**. This may encompass, for example, greater degrees of angle, placement, and positioning of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument within or with respect to the suspension valve **813**. It may be that the flexibly suspended suspension valve **813** from the body portion **815** allows the suspended valve **813** to better conform to various insertion angles and placements of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument. This enhanced conformation of the drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument with respect to the suspension valve **813** may improve the seal generated by the suspension valve **813** with the respective drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument, for example.

[00265] Referring now to FIG. **8e**, there is shown a bottom view from the underside (relative to the arrangement shown in FIGS. **8a** to **8c**) of the receptacle device of FIG. **8a**. The suspended

valve **813** can be seen through the hole **845** of the annulus **843** of the anchor portion **817**, the valve **813** being in the closed position and shown protruding outwardly with respect to the plane of the body portion **815**.

[00266] Referring now to FIG. **8f**, there is shown a cross sectional side view through D-D of the suspension valve **813** in the closed position of FIG. **8d**. The curved surface **857** of the suspension valve **813** is clearly seen in FIG. **8f**. In the same way, the configuration of the body portion **815** surrounding the suspension valve **813** and extending perpendicularly from the anchor portion **817** is also visible in FIG. **8f**. The body portion **815** offers the advantage of allowing a user to grip it to hold the receptacle device **805** in position while a drinking, feeding, or inhaling instrument is inserted or withdrawn through/from the suspension valve **813** so that the accompanying mask is not displaced from against the user's face. The suspension ridge **869** connects the inner annular edge **871** located at the top **833** of the body portion **815** with the outer edge **873** of the suspension valve **813**. In the resting state of the receptacle device **805**, the suspension valve **813**, the suspension ridge **869** and body portion **871** define a space **875** therebetween. In this embodiment, the space **875** has an annular shape and is located beneath the suspension ridge **869** allowing for some lateral movement of the suspension valve **813** even though being surrounded by the body portion **815**.

[00267] Referring now to FIG. **8g**, there is shown the cross-sectional side view of FIG. **8f** following an application of force **865** on the body portion **815**. This can be defined as a compressed state. With respect to the orientation of the page, it can be seen that the external force indicated by arrow **865** is applied laterally against the body portion **815**. The effect of the external force **865** is to squeeze the body portion **815** inwardly by a distance indicated **866** (same approximate distance as distance **766** shown in FIG. 7**g**) thereby causing body portion inner wall **877** facing the suspension valve **813** to move closer to the suspension valve **813** without squeezing or altering the position of the suspension valve **813**. In effect, the space **875** collapses allowing for movement of the body portion **815** inwardly without causing the valve petals **853** of the suspension valve **813** to flex so that the hermetic seal is preserved even when a user is gripping the outer surface **879** of the body portion **815** as an aid to insertion and removal of a drinking, feeding or inhaling instrument (not shown), and when the mask (not shown) or securing

portion (not shown) engages the channel **823** so tightly that it squeezes the bridge portion **861** or body portion **815**. The external force **865** is absorbed by the suspension ridge **869** in this manner. This protects the integrity of the suspension valve **813** and maintain the seal to prevent/minimize air and contaminants leakage therethrough. This should be contrasted with the same external force being applied to the receptacle device **705** shown in FIG. **7f**, for example, in which an external force on the hemispherical valve **713** can cause disruption of the hermetic seal.

[00268] In this embodiment, the suspension valve **813** is allowed to slide/shift within the body portion **815** thereby utilizing more surface area of the valve petals **853** to more securely grip the drinking, feeding, or inhalation instrument, thus allowing the user to adjust the position and angle of a drinking, feeding, or inhalation instrument (not shown). The more secure grip creates a better seal and minimizes air leakage when the suspension valve **813** is housing the drinking, feeding, or inhalation instrument in a holding state, and when the suspension valve **813** is in an active state when it is operable to allow insertion and removal of a drinking, feeding, or inhalation instrument therefrom.

[00269] Referring now to FIG. **8h**, there is shown a cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device **805** comprising a suspension valve **813** in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. This embodiment differs from that shown in FIG. **8f**, for example, only in that the body portion **815** comprises an annular groove **885** on the top surface **833** of the body portion **815** proximal the suspension ridge **869**. The annular groove **885** may extend even further the degree of freedom/range of motion afforded to the suspension valve **813** surrounded by the body portion **815**.

[00270] Referring now to FIG. **9a**, there is shown a plan view of a receptacle device **905** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising a hemispherical valve **913** in operation receiving a drinking, feeding or inhaling instrument embodied by a straw **909**. FIG. **9b** is a cross-sectional side view through H-H of the receptacle device **905** in operation of FIG. **9a**. FIGS. **9a** and **9b** illustrate how the valve petals **953** grip the straw **909** during insertion and use. The straw **909** is shown inserted off-center (with respect to the center of the hemispherical valve **913** so that it is resides near the inner wall **977** of the body portion **915**) in order to better

illustrate the function of various valves suitable for use with the receptacle device of the present invention. In this embodiment containing the hemispherical valve **913**, the valve petals **953** have one degree of motion, moving up or down in the longitudinal direction which is generally orthogonal to the plane of the hemispherical valve **913**. In such an arrangement, when the straw **909** is inserted or shifted off center or at an angle, only those valve petals **953a** closest to the straw **909** can provide sufficient surface area and pressure on the straw **909** to create a secure grip. The valve petals **953b** on the opposite side to the straw **909** do not have sufficient length to provide equal surface area and grip to the straw **909**, thereby potentially resulting in large (air) gaps **981** allowing contaminants undesirably to enter the mask (not shown).

[00271] Referring now to FIG. **10a**, there is shown a plan view of a receptacle device **1005** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising a suspension valve **1013** in operation receiving a drinking, feeding or inhaling instrument embodied by a straw **1009**. FIG. **10b** is a cross-sectional side view through I-I of the receptacle device **1005** in operation of FIG. **10a**. FIGS. **10a** and **10b** illustrate how the valve petals **1053** grip the straw **1009** during insertion and use. The straw **1009** is shown inserted off-center (with respect to the center of the suspension valve **1013** so that it is resides near the inner wall **1077** of body portion **1015**) in the same manner as shown in FIGS. **9a** and **9b**; however, in this embodiment containing the suspension valve **1013**, the suspension valve **1013** is able to move/shift laterally to accommodate the movement of the straw **1009** during use, thereby allowing the valve petals **1053** to move with the straw **1009** and more evenly apply pressure from all sides onto the straw **1009**. The straw **1009** can, therefore, move in various degrees of motion, such that the straw **1009** can move up, down, laterally and at most angles with respect to the longitudinal direction which is generally orthogonal to the plane of the hemispherical valve **1013**.

[00272] Various portions of the suspension valve **1013** may stretch or contract. The suspension ridge portion **1069b** on the side of the suspension valve **1013** away from the straw **1009** is seen stretching in order to help reach the straw **1009**, while the suspension ridge portion **1069a** on the side of the suspension valve **1013** closest to the straw **1009** is seen contracting to accommodate its proximity thereto. In addition, the respective valve petals **1053b** and **1053a** are seen stretching and contracting. The combined efforts of the suspension ridge **1069** and

valve petals **1053** allow a more optimal location (proximal to the straw **1009**) for the valve petals **1053** to reach the straw **1009** comfortably without over-reaching or contracting in any particular direction or dimension. More particularly, this allows valve petals **1053** on all sides to apply more surface area and pressure to securely grip the straw **1009**, thus minimizing (air) gaps **1083** and generating a desirable seal.

[00273] Referring now to FIG. **11a**, there is shown a perspective view of an assembly **1107a** having a receptacle device **1105a** and a mask **1103a** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device **1105a** is a unitary construction. More particularly, in this embodiment, the receptacle device **1105a** is a unitary construction in the same manner as described in relation to FIG. **7a**, and comprises a body portion **1115a** that is integrally formed with an anchor portion **1117a** by way of a bridge portion **1161a**. The receptacle device **1105a** may comprise a hemispherical or suspension valve **1113a** surrounded by the body portion **1115a**. The mask **1103a** is a rectangular sheet of an electrostatic non-woven polypropylene fiber comprising a hole **1111a** at its center. It will be understood that, in operation, the interior surface **1149a** of the mask **1103a** faces towards the user's face (not shown). In the same way, the exterior surface **1151a** of the mask **1103a** faces away from the user's face. In operation, the receptacle device **1105a**, and more specifically the body portion **1115a** in this embodiment, is inserted through the hole **1111a** of the mask **1103a** in the direction indicated by arrow **1187a** to engage it therewith by way of the channel **1123a**. This is best seen in FIG. **11b** that shows a cross-sectional side view of FIG. **11a** following assembly of the receptacle device **1105a** and the mask **1103a**. In the assembled configuration, the body portion **1115a** is exposed on the side of the exterior surface **1151a** of the mask **110a3**, while the anchor portion **1117a** is hidden on the side of the interior surface **1149a** of the mask **1103a**.

[00274] In this embodiment, for example, the receptacle device **1105a** engages a mask **1103a** by way of the channel **1123a** in the form of a groove **1123a**. More particularly, the body portion **1115a** can be pushed through a hole **1111a** in a mask **1103a** so that it protrudes therethrough. The body portion **1115a** may be flexible/deformable in that its shape can be temporarily changed to more easily fit through the hole **1111a** in the mask **1103a**. For example, the body portion **1115a** may be squeezed to help push it through the hole **1111a** of the mask **1103a**. This provides the

benefit of an integrally formed body portion **1115a** and anchor portion **1117a** of larger diameter to squeeze through a smaller diameter hole **1111a** of the mask **1103a**, thus allowing the mask **1103a** to be trapped/releasably engaged within the channel **1123a** between the body portion **1115a** and anchor portion **1117a**. This flexibility of the body portion **1115a** is what allows the integral formation of the body portion **1115a** and anchor portion **1117a** to be possible while still maintaining the releasable engagement of the mask **1103a** with the channel **1123a**.

[00275] Referring now to FIG. **11c**, there is shown a perspective view of a receptacle device **1105b** and a mask **1103b** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device **1105b** comprises a body portion **1115b** and anchor portion **1117b** which are separate components. This may allow the body portion to be interchangeable and attachable to the anchor portion, and/or the anchor portion to be interchangeable and attachable to the body portion. The receptacle device **1105b** can in embodiments comprise a hemispherical or suspension valve **1113b** surrounded by the body portion **1115b**. The body portion **1115b**, optionally, comprises a bridge portion **1161b** on its underside, while the anchor portion **1117b**, optionally, comprises an anchor bridge portion **1161bb** on its upper face. In operation, the anchor portion **1117b** is moved upwardly in the direction indicated by arrow **1187bb** towards the hole **1111b** of the mask **1103b**, while the body portion is moved downwardly in the direction indicated by arrow **1187b** towards the hole **1111b** of the mask **1103b**. In this way, the bridge portion **1161b** and the anchor bridge portion **1161bb** meet and interconnect through the hole **1111b** of the mask **1103b** forming a channel **1123b** and trapping the mask **1103b** therein. This is best seen in FIG. **11d** that shows a cross-sectional side view of FIG. **11c** following assembly of the receptacle device **1105b** and the mask **1103b**. In the assembled configuration, the body portion **1115b** is exposed on the side of the exterior surface **1151b** of the mask **1103b**, while the anchor portion **1117b** is hidden on the side of the interior surface **1149b** of the mask **1103b**.

[00276] Referring now to FIG. **11e**, there is shown a cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device **1105c** similar to that shown in FIGS. **11b** and **11d**, but comprising a securing portion **1119c**. The securing portion **1119c** is located between the mask **1103c** and body portion **1115c**. This generates a pressure seal or hermetic seal in keeping with the purpose of the invention to prevent contaminants from entering the mask **1103c** while a user is drinking, feeding or inhaling.

This may be attributed to the securing portion **1119c** applying pressure against the respecting neighboring surfaces of the mask **1103c**, body portion **1115c** and anchor portion **1117c**.

[00277] Referring now to FIG. **12a**, there is shown a perspective view of an assembly **1207a** having a receptacle device **1205a** and a mask **1203a** engaging an annular securing portion **1219a** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device **1205a** is a unitary construction, comprising a body portion **1215a** that is integrally formed with an anchor portion **1217a** by way of a bridge portion **1261a**. The receptacle device **1205a** may comprise a hemispherical or suspension valve **1213a** surrounded by the body portion **1215a**. In this embodiment, there is shown a securing portion **1219a**; wherein the anchor portion **1217a** and the body portion **1215a** define a channel **1223a** therebetween, and the channel **1223a** is configured to releasably engage the securing portion **1219a**; and wherein the securing portion **1219a** is configured to engage the mask by plastic joining at the hole **1211a** of the mask **1203a**. In other embodiments, it will be appreciated that the securing portion **1219d** may be configured to engage the mask by at least one of adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements. In operation, the receptacle device **1205a**, and more specifically the body portion **1215a** in this embodiment, is inserted through the hole **1241a** of the securing portion **1219a** in the direction indicated by arrow **1287a** to engage it therewith by way of the channel **1223a**. This is best seen in FIG. **12c** that shows a cross-sectional side view of FIG. **12a**.

[00278] In this embodiment, for example, the receptacle device **1205a** engages a mask **1203a** by way of the channel **1223a** in the form of a groove **1223a**. More particularly, the body portion **1215a** can be pushed through a hole **1241a** in the securing portion **1219a** so that it protrudes therethrough. The body portion **1215a** may be flexible/deformable in that its shape can be temporarily changed to more easily fit through the hole **1241a** of the securing portion **1219a**. For example, the body portion **1215a** may be squeezed to help push it through the hole **1241a** of the securing portion **1219a**. This provides the benefit of an integrally formed body portion **1215a** and anchor portion **1217a** of larger diameter to squeeze through a smaller diameter hole **1241a** of the securing portion **1219a**, thus allowing the securing portion **1219a** to be trapped/releasably engaged within the channel **1223a** between the body portion **1215a** and anchor portion **1217a**. This flexibility of the body portion **1215a** is what allows the integral formation of the body portion

1215a and anchor portion **1217a** to be possible while still maintaining the releasable engagement of the securing portion **1219a** with the channel **1223a**.

[00279] Referring now to FIG. **12b**, there is shown a perspective view of an assembly **1207b** having a receptacle device **1205b** and a mask **1203b** engaging a securing portion **1219b** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device **1205b** comprises a body portion **1215b** and anchor portion **1217b** which are separate components. This may allow the body portion to be interchangeable and attachable to the anchor portion, and/or the anchor portion to be interchangeable and attachable to the body portion. The receptacle device **1205b** may comprise a hemispherical or suspension valve **1213b** surrounded by the body portion **1215b**. This arrangement is similar to that shown in FIG. **11c**, except that the the bridge portion **1261b** and the anchor bridge portion **1261bb** meet and interconnect through the hole **1241b** of the securing portion **1219b** forming a channel and trapping the mask **1203b** and securing portion **1219b** therein. This is best seen in the cross-sectional side views of FIGS. **12c**, **12d** and **12e**.

[00280] Referring now to FIG. **12c**, there is shown a cross-sectional side view of the receptacle device **1205c** and the mask **1203c**. In this first assembled configuration of the invention engaging a securing portion **1219c**, the channel **1223c** defined between the body portion **1215c** and the anchor portion **1217c** releasably engages the securing portion **1219c**. The outer edge of the securing portion **1219c** engages the hole **1211c** of the mask **1203c**. The mask **1203c** then extends laterally from the securing portion **1219c**. The body portion **1215c** is exposed on the side of the exterior surface **1251c** of the mask **1203c**, while the anchor portion **1217c** is hidden on the side of the interior surface **1249c** of the mask **1203c**.

[00281] Referring now to FIG. **12d**, there is shown a cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device **1205d** and a mask **1203d** according to an embodiment of the invention engaging a securing portion **1219d** in a second configuration. In this second configuration, the channel **1223d** defined between the body portion **1215d** and the anchor portion **1217d** releasably engages both the securing portion **1219d** and the mask **1203d**. The securing portion **1219d** engages the exterior surface **1251d** of the mask **1203d** and sits beneath the body portion **1215d**; essentially located between said mask **1203d** and body portion **1215d**.

[00282] Referring now to FIG. **12e**, there is shown a cross-sectional side view of a receptacle device **1205e** and a mask **1203e** according to an embodiment of the invention engaging a securing portion **1219e** in a third configuration. In this third configuration, the channel **1223e** defined between the body portion **1215e** and the anchor portion **1217e** releasably engages both the mask **1203e** and the securing portion **1219e**. The securing portion **1219e** engages the interior surface **1249e** of the mask **1203e** and sits on top of the anchor portion **1217e**; essentially located between said anchor portion **1217e** and mask **1203e**.

[00283] Referring now to FIG. **13a**, there is shown a mask assembly 1307 and a receptacle device **1305** for a mask **1303**, the receptacle device **1305** comprising: a hemispherical or suspension valve **1313**; a body portion **1315** surrounding the valve **1313**; and an anchor portion **1317**. In this embodiment, the body portion **1315** and anchor portion **1317** are integrally formed (unitary construction). This embodiment is particularly effective in attaching to masks of the N95 variety (both molded and unmolded). In this embodiment, the anchor portion **1317** is configured to engage the hole **1311** of the mask **1303** by welding. Engagement by welding generates a strong hermetic seal between the receptacle device **1305** and the mask **1303** without use of any additional elements or chemicals that might be required in other engagements. It will be appreciated that, while engagement by welding is utilized in this embodiment, in other embodiments, at least one of the body portion and anchor portion may be configured to engage the mask by any suitable mechanism which may include plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, or magnetic elements, for instance.

[00284] Referring now to FIG. **13b**, there is shown the cross-section through E-E of the mask assembly **1307** of FIG. **13a**. It can be seen that the outer edge of the body portion **1315b** engages the hole **1311b** of the mask **1303b**. The mask **1303b** then extends laterally from the body portion **1315b**. Additionally, the receptacle device **1305b** is seated centrally with respect to the mask **1303b** such that approximately half of the body portion **1315b** protrudes outwardly through the mask **1303b** to the outside of the mask **1303b**, and approximately half of the body portion **1315b** (involving the anchor portion **1317b**) protrudes inwardly through the mask **1303b** to the inside of the mask **1303b**. It will be appreciated that in other embodiments, the majority of the body portion **1315b** (including the anchor portion **1317b**) may protrude outwardly through the mask

1303b or inwardly through the mask **1303b**. Such embodiments can be seen in FIGS. **13c** through **13h**. The embodiment shown in FIG. **13c** is similar to the receptacle device **1305b** of FIG. **13b**, for instance, except that the majority of the body portion **1315b** sits exterior to the mask **1303b**. The anchor portion **1317c** sits nearly flush with the mask **1303c**, and the outer edge of the body portion **1315c** engages the hole **1311c** of the mask **1303c**, which then extends laterally from the body portion **1315c**. FIG. **13d** shows an embodiment similar to the embodiment seen in FIG. **13c**, except that the bottom surface of the receptacle device **1305d** engages the exterior surface **1351d** of the mask **1303d**.

[00285] Referring now to FIGS. **13e** and **13f**, there is shown a perspective view of a mask assembly generally indicated **1307e**, and a cross-section through F-F of the same. The mask assembly **1307e** is generally the same as the mask assembly **1307**, except that a top surface **1333e** of the receptacle device **1305e** sits almost flush with an exterior face **1351e** of the mask **1303e** which faces away from the user's face in operation. Thus, the top surface **1333e** and the exterior face **1351e** define a substantially smooth surface. In this embodiment, the body portion **1315e** is integrally formed with the anchor portion **1317e**. Therefore, in this embodiment, the body portion **1315e** (comprising the anchor portion **1317e**) sits below the interior face **1349e** of the mask **1303e**. The outer edge of the body portion **1315e** engages the hole **1311e** of the mask **1303e**, which then extends laterally from the body portion **1315e**. Referring now to FIGS. **13g** and **13h**, a cross-section through G-G of the same, there is shown a mask assembly **1307g** similar to the mask assembly **1307e** seen in FIG. **13e**, except that the top surface **1333g** of the body portion **1315g** engages the interior surface **1349g** of the mask **1303g**. As such, the only portion of the body portion **1315g** that is visible from the exterior of the mask **1303g** is the valve **1313g**.

[00286] Referring now to FIGS. **13i** and **13j**, there is shown a perspective view of a mask assembly generally indicated **1307i**, and a cross-section through H-H of the same. In this embodiment, there is shown a receptacle device **1305i** for a mask **1303i**, the receptacle device **1305i** comprising: a hemispherical or suspension valve **1313i**; a body portion **1315i** surrounding the valve **1313i**; and an anchor portion **1317i** formed integrally with the body portion **1315i** (a unitary construction); wherein the body portion **1315i** (integrally formed with the anchor portion **1317i**) is configured to engage the mask **1303i** (at its hole **1311i**, for example) by plastic joining.

It will be appreciated, however, that in other embodiments, at least one of the body portion **1315i** and anchor portion may be configured to engage the mask **1303i** by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements. The mask assembly **1307i** is generally the same as the mask assembly **1307**, except that the body portion **1315i** is substantially shorter in height than that of the body portion **1315i**, which means that the body portion **1315i** is substantially in line with the longitudinal axis of the mask **1303i**. The hemispherical or suspension valve **1313i**, however, sits primarily beneath the longitudinal axis of the mask **1303i**. The outer edge of the body portion **1315i** engages the hole **1311i** of the mask **1303i**, which then extends laterally from the body portion **1315i.**

[00287] Referring now to FIG. **13k**, there is shown a perspective view of a receptacle device **1305k** in accordance with another embodiment of the invention that is the same as that shown in FIG. **13i**, except in this embodiment an anchor portion formed integrally with the body portion **1315k** (a unitary construction) sits on top of a mask **1303k** and engages the exterior surface **1351k** of the mask **1303k**. In this way, the body portion **1315k** sits on top of and is not quite flush with the exterior surface **1351k** of the mask **1303k**. This is best seen in FIG. **13l**, a cross-section through I-I of FIG. **13k**.

[00288] Referring now to FIGS. **13m** and **13n**, a cross-section through J-J of the same, there is shown a mask assembly **1307m** similar to the mask assembly **1307k** of FIG. **13k**, except that the top surface **1333m** of the body portion **1315m** engages the interior surface **1349m** of the mask **1303m**. As such, the only portion of the body portion **1315m** that is visible from outside the mask **1303m** during use is the valve **1313m**.

[00289] Referring now to FIG. **14a**, there is shown a perspective view of a receptacle device **1405** in accordance with another embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device **1405** comprises a body portion **1415** and anchor portion **1417** which are separate components. This may allow the body portion to be interchangeable and attachable to the anchor portion, and/or the anchor portion to be interchangeable and attachable to the body portion. The body portion **1415** may comprise a hemispherical or suspension valve **1413**. The anchor portion **1417** is configured to engage the mask **1403** by plastic joining at the hole **1411** of the mask **1403**. It will be appreciated that other embodiments may engage the mask **1403** by any suitable mechanism

which may include plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, or magnetic elements, for instance. In operation, the body portion **1415** is moved downwardly in the direction indicated by arrow **1487** towards the anchor portion **1417**. In this way, the body portion **1413** and the anchor bridge portion **1461** meet and interconnect. As shown in FIG. **14b**, the anchor portion **1417a** may have a smaller diameter than the anchor portion **1417** of FIG. **14a**. Its diameter can be reduced to as little as, or even smaller than, the diameter of the anchor bridge portion **1461a**. In such a case, a smaller diameter hole **1411a** can be cut in the mask **1403a** to engage with the reduced diameter of the anchor portion **1417a**.

[00290] FIG. **14c** shows a cross-sectional side view of FIG. **14a** following assembly of the receptacle device **1405** and the mask **1403**. In this first assembled configuration, the outer edge of the anchor portion **1417** engages the hole **1411** of the mask **1403**, which then extends laterally from the anchor portion **1417**. FIG. **14d** shows a second configuration in which the anchor portion **1417b** engages the exterior surface **1451b** of the mask **1403b**. FIG. **14e** shows a third configuration in which the anchor portion **1417c** engages the interior surface **1449c** of the mask **1403c**; essentially the mask **1403c** is located between said anchor portion **1417c** and body portion **1415c**.

[00291] Referring now to FIG. **15a**, there is shown a perspective view of a receptacle device **1505** in accordance with another embodiment of the invention in which the receptacle device **1505** comprises a body portion **1515** and anchor portion **1517** which are separate components. This may allow the body portion to be interchangeable and attachable to the anchor portion, and/or the anchor portion to be interchangeable and attachable to the body portion. The body portion **1515** may comprise a hemispherical or suspension valve **1513**. The body portion **1517** is configured to engage the mask **1503** by plastic joining at the hole **1511** of the mask **1503**. It will be appreciated that in other embodiments the body portion 1517 may engage the mask **1503** by any suitable mechanism which may include plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, or magnetic elements, for instance. In operation, the anchor portion **1515** is moved upwardly in the direction indicated by arrow **1587** towards the body portion **1515**. In this way, the body portion **1515** and the anchor bridge portion **1561** meet and interconnect. As shown in FIG. **15b**, the anchor portion **1517a** may have a smaller diameter than

the anchor portion **1517** seen in FIG. **15a**. Its diameter can be reduced to as little as, or even smaller than, the diameter of the anchor bridge portion **1561a**.

[00292] FIG. **15c** shows a cross-sectional side view of FIG. **15a** following assembly of the receptacle device **1505** and the mask **1503**. In this first assembled configuration, the outer edge of the body portion **1515** engages the hole **1511** of the mask **1503**, which then extends laterally from the body portion **1515**. It will be appreciated that, in other embodiments, the majority of the body portion **1515** may protrude outwardly through the mask **1503**, as shown in FIG. **15d** or inwardly through the mask **1503**, as shown in FIG. **15e**. FIG. **15f** shows a fourth configuration in which the top surface **1533a** of the body portion **1515a** engages the interior surface **1549a** of the mask **1503a**. As such, the only portion of the body portion **1515a** that is visible from outside the mask **1503a** during use is the valve **1513a**.

[00293] Referring now to FIG. **16**, there is shown a perspective exploded view of a receptacle device **1605** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. In this embodiment, the receptacle device **1605** comprises a body portion **1615** and anchor portion **1617** which are separate components utilizing a push-pull mechanism for connection with one another. More particularly, in operation, to assemble a mask assembly, for instance, the body portion **1615** surrounding the valve **1613** is pushed towards the anchor portion **1617** in the direction indicated by arrow **1687**, and concurrently engaging (trapping) a mask **1603** in a channel (not shown in exploded view) defined therebetween. In this embodiment, the diameter of the hollow body portion **1615** is slightly greater than that of the anchor portion **1617** which allows the hollow body portion to receive the anchor portion **1617** by way of an interference fit to hold the separate components together by friction and, in turn, engage the mask **1603**. To release the joint formed between the body portion **1615** and the anchor portion **1617**, and consequently release the mask **1603**, the body portion **1615** can be pulled in the opposite direction to the direction indicated by arrow **1687**. It will be appreciated that any of the suitable embodiments defined herein may comprise a push-pull mechanism to releasably engage any of the separate components.

[00294] Referring now to FIG. **17**, there is shown a perspective exploded view of a receptacle device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. In this embodiment, the receptacle device **1705** comprises a body portion **1715** and anchor portion **1717** which are

separate components utilizing a screw-fit mechanism for connection with one another. The body portion **1715** comprises an internal thread **1789** on its internal wall (not shown), while the anchor portion **1717** comprises an external thread **1791** on external surface **1793**. The anchor portion **1717** may also comprise a lip **1795** at its base **1797**. In operation, to assemble a mask assembly, for instance, the body portion **1715** surrounding the valve **1713** is moved in the direction indicated by arrow **1787** and screwed in a clockwise manner, for instance, onto the anchor portion **1717**, concurrently engaging (trapping) a mask **1703** in a channel (not shown in exploded view) defined therebetween. In this embodiment, the diameter of the hollow body portion **1715** is slightly greater than that of the anchor portion **1717** which allows the hollow body portion to receive the anchor portion **1717** by way of screwing it therein in order to hold the separate components together by way of the engagement of the internal thread **1789** with the external thread **1791** and, in turn, engage the mask **1703**. To release the joint formed between the body portion **1715** and the anchor portion **1717**, and consequently release the mask **1703**, the body portion **1715** can be screwed (rotated) in the opposite direction (anticlockwise, for instance) and moved in the direction opposite to that indicated by arrow **1787**. It will be appreciated that any of the suitable embodiments defined herein may comprise a screw-fit mechanism to releasably engage any of the separate components.

[00295] Referring now to FIG. **18**, there is shown a perspective exploded view of a receptacle device **1805** in accordance with another embodiment of the invention comprising a body portion **1815** and valve **1813** which are separate components. In this embodiment, the body portion is a short cylinder **1831** with a hole **1825** through its center extending through to its top surface **1833**. The valve **1813** comprises a circular ring top **1899** from which a circular skirt **1898** extends about its perimeter. The receptacle device **1805** also comprises a valve seat **1896**. The valve seat **1896** comprises a circular ring top **1894** from which a circular base **1892** extends. The diameter of the circular ring top **1894** is slightly greater than the diameter of the circular ring top **1899**; thus, when engaged, the valve **1813** sits comfortably in the valve seat **1896**. When assembled, the valve **1813** is inserted through the bottom (not shown) of the body portion **1815** in the direction indicated by arrow **1890** to fill the hole **1825** in the top surface **1833**. Next, the valve seat **1896** is also inserted through the bottom of the body portion **1815** in the direction indicated by arrow

1888 towards the valve **1813** and engages therewith to hold it in position relative to the body portion **1815**. The valve seat **1896** may optionally snap into the body portion **1815**, thus securing the valve **1813** in place, or the valve seat **1896** may optionally secure the valve **1813** by friction or tight fit. This embodiment demonstrates that the body portion and valve can be separate components and formed in accordance with the present invention. This is true for any suitable environment defined herein. It will be appreciated that this embodiment of the receptacle device **1805** may include an anchor portion.

[00296] Referring now to FIGS. **19a** to **19e**, there are shown plan views of various valve slit patterns in accordance with embodiments of the invention. More particularly, FIGS. **19a** to **19e** illustrate that the slit patterns generate valve petals **1953**. FIG. **19a** is of a slit pattern that comprises dual crosshairs **1937a**, **1937b** which intersect at their respective centers **1986a** and define a cross shape. FIG. **19b** is of a slit pattern that comprises three crosshairs **1937c**, **1937d**, **1937e** which intersect at their respective centers **1986b** and are radially equally spaced. FIG. **19c** is of a slit pattern that comprises three crosshairs **1937f**, **1937g**, **1937h**, wherein each of the at three crosshairs **1937f**, **1937g**, **1937h** radially extend from a common center **1986c** and are radially equally spaced. FIG. **19d** is of a slit pattern that comprises four crosshairs **1937i**, **1937j**, **1937k**, **1937l** which intersect at their respective centers **1986d** and are radially equally spaced. FIG. **19e** is of a slit pattern that comprises a snowflake pattern. In this embodiment, the snowflake pattern comprises two crosshairs **1937m**, **1937n** which intersect at their respective centers **1986e** and define a cross shape. At each of the four ends furthest from the centers **1986e** there are defined V-shapes **1984**.

[00297] Any receptacle device formed in accordance with the invention defined herein may utilize any of the slit patterns described above. The slit pattern is configured to conform to the shape of a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument when inserted through the valve. The slit pattern is configured to releasably grip and hold in position a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument when inserted through the valve.

[00298] Referring now to FIGS. **20a** to **20d,** there are shown side views of various valve arrangements relative to the body portion in accordance with embodiments of the invention. FIG. **20a** shows the valve **2013a** in line with the body portion **2015a**. FIG. **20b** shows the valve

2013b raised above the body portion **2015b**. FIG. **20c** shows the valve **2013c** recessed with respect to the body portion **2015c**. FIG. **20d** shows the valve at **2013d** in line with the body portion **2015d** in the same manner shown in FIG. **20a**, except that the valve **2013d** is almost the same width as the body portion **2015d**, whereas the width of the body portion **2015a** is larger than the width of the valve **2013a**. It will be appreciated that any receptacle device formed in accordance with the invention defined herein may utilize any of the valve profiles described herein.

[00299] Referring now to FIGS. **21a** to **21d**, there are shown side views of various guide portion arrangements relative to the body portion in accordance with embodiments of the invention. FIG. **21a** illustrates a body portion **2115a** surrounding a valve **2113a**. A guide portion **2182a** is positioned at the periphery of the valve **2113a** where it meets the body portion **2115a**. The guide portion **2182a** comprises a base **2180a** which engages the body portion **2115a**. The guide portion **2182a** has a linear funnel-shape which tapers towards the base **2180a**. It will be appreciated that in other embodiments, the guide portion may comprise a base and a wall, and wherein the wall extends generally orthogonally from the base. Alternatively or additionally, in embodiments, the guide portion may comprise a base and a wall, and wherein the wall tapers towards the base. FIG. **21b** Is the same as FIG. **21a**, except that the guide potion **2182b** has an exponential/curved follow-shape that tapers towards the base **2180b**. FIG. **21c** is the same as FIG. **21a**, except that the body portion **2115c** comprises the guide potion **2182c** towards its top slanted surface **2178c**. In this way, the funnel- shaped guide portion **2182c** is built within the body portion **2115c**. It will be appreciated that the width of the body portion **2115c** can be as narrow as the valve **2113c** or as wide as the guide portion **2182c**. FIG. **21d** is the same as FIG. **21a**, except that the guide portion **2182d** has a flat surface **2176d** which extends outwardly and away from the valve **2113d**. In this embodiment, therefore, the guide portion **2182d** is parallel with and sits on the top flat surface **2174d** of the body portion **2115d**. It will be appreciated that the guide portion may be detachably attachable to the body portion, or comprised within the body portion, in any of the suitable embodiments defined herein. Although not shown, it will be understood that the guide portion may be detachably attachable to a securing portion.

[00300] Referring now to FIG. **22**, that is shown a perspective view of a cap **2221** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. The cap **2221** is substantially similar to that shown in FIG. **2**, except that it comprises a logo on its top flat surface **2274**. In this way, the cap **2221** comprises an exterior surface **2272** for displaying advertising indicia or decoration. It will be appreciated that in some embodiments, it may be that the securing portion comprises an exterior surface for displaying advertising indicia or decoration. Alternatively or additionally, in some embodiments, the body portion may comprise an exterior surface for displaying advertising indicia or decoration. It will be appreciated that the cap **2221** may be a separate component or formed as part of another component formed in accordance with the present invention. The cap **2221** may be configured to engage a body portion (not shown) or a guide portion (not shown). It may be that the cap **2221** is connectable to a body portion (not shown) or a guide portion (not shown) by screwing thereon, by clipping thereon, by a hinge connection, by a string attachment, or by a push-pull connection, for instance. It will be appreciated that any receptacle device formed in accordance with the invention defined herein may utilize the cap described herein.

[00301] Referring now to FIG. **23**, there is shown a collection of side and perspective views of various shapes of a body portion, anchor portion, securing portion and/or cap in accordance with embodiments of the invention. These shapes include a circle **2370a**; an annulus **2370b**; a stadium **1370c**; an ellipse **2370d**; an oval-shaped ring **2370e**; human-lip-shape **2370f**; a triangle **2370g**; a square **2370h**; a rectangular prism **2370i**; a diamond **2370j**; a rhombus **2370k**; a trapezoid **2370l**; a pentagon **2370m**; a hexagon **2370n**; an octagon **2370o**; a decagon **2370p**; a cylinder **2370q**; and a sun-like shape **2370r**.

[00302] Referring now to FIG. **24a** there is shown a perspective view of a body portion **2415** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping ridges **2466**. The body portion **2415** is a short cylinder **2431a** with a hole **2425** through its center. At the top **2433** of the short cylinder **2431a** is located a valve **2413**. The short cylinder **2431a** comprises an outer circular wall **2468a** on which are equidistantly placed the gripping ridges **2466** about the entire perimeter thereof. The gripping ridges **2466** facilitate assembly/installation of the receptacle device formed according to the present invention. The gripping ridges **2466** also find utility during use of the receptacle device as an aid to the user to grip the body portion **2415** while inserting or removing

a drinking, feeding or inhaling instrument from the valve **2413**, for instance. It will be appreciated that in at least some embodiments, a securing portion may comprise gripping ridges. The gripping ridges may be equidistantly positioned about a perimeter of such a securing portion.

[00303] Referring now to FIG. **24b**, there is show a perspective view of an anchor portion **2417** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping ridges **2466**. In this embodiment, the anchor portion **2417** is a short cylinder **2431b** comprising an outer circular wall **2468b** on which are equidistantly placed the gripping ridges **2466** about the entire perimeter thereof. The gripping ridges **2466** facilitate assembly/installation of the receptacle device formed according to the present invention to help connect the anchor portion **2417** to other parts of the receptacle device, for instance.

[00304] Referring now to FIG. **25a**, there is shown a perspective view of a body portion **2515** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping notches. The body portion **2515** surrounds a valve **2513**, as shown in other embodiments herein. In this embodiment, the body portion **2515** comprises a top annulus **2562** which surrounds the valve **2513**, and an annular skirt **2560** that extends orthogonally downwardly from the plane of the top annulus **2562**. The top annulus **2562** comprises gripping notches **2564** about its entire perimeter that are equidistantly spaced from one another. The gripping notches **2564** facilitate gripping while installation and use of a receptacle device formed in accordance with the present invention which includes said gripping notches **2564**.

[00305] Referring now to FIG. **25b**, there is shown a perspective view of a securing portion **2519** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping notches **2564**. In this embodiment, the securing portion **2519** is a ring **2539** comprising a hole **2541** at its center. The ring **2539** comprises gripping notches **2564** about its entire perimeter that are equidistantly spaced from one another. The gripping notches **2564** facilitate gripping while installation and use of a receptacle device formed in accordance with the present invention which includes said gripping notches **2564**.

[00306] Referring now to FIG. **25c**, there is shown a perspective view of an anchor portion **2517** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention comprising gripping notches **2564.** In this embodiment, the anchor portion **2517** is a ring **2543** comprising a hole **2545** at its center.

The ring **2543** comprises gripping notches **2564** about its entire perimeter that are equidistantly spaced from one another. The gripping notches **2564** facilitate gripping while installation and use of a receptacle device formed in accordance with the present invention which includes said gripping notches **2564**.

[00307] Referring now to FIG. **25d**, there is shown a perspective view of an anchor portion **2517** in accordance with another embodiment of the invention comprising gripping notches **2564**. The anchor portion in **2517** comprises a short cylinder **2558**, which has a circular base **2597**. The anchor portion **2517** also comprises a lip **2595** which extends about the perimeter of the circular base **2597**. The lip **2595** comprises gripping notches **2564** about its entire perimeter that are equidistantly spaced from one another. The gripping notches **2564** facilitate gripping while installation and use of a receptacle device formed in accordance with the present invention which includes said gripping notches **2564**. It will be appreciated that any receptacle device formed in accordance with the invention defined herein may utilize any of the gripping notch embodiments described herein, for example, those shown in FIGS. **25a** to **25d**.

[00308] Referring now to FIG. **26a**, there is shown a perspective view of a receptacle device **2605a** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in operation receiving a drinking instrument **2609a**, constituted by a straw **2609a**, through a valve **2613a**.

[00309] FIG. **26b** is a perspective view of a receptacle device **2605b** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in operation receiving an adapter **2609b**. In this embodiment, the adapter **2609b** is cone-shaped such that the smaller end **2656** is inserted into the valve **2613b** of the receptacle device **2605b**, while the larger end **2654** functions to engage drinking, feeding or inhalation instruments, such as an L-shaped inhaler **2609b1** or a cylindrical squeeze bottle **2609b2**. It will be understood that in other embodiments, the adapter may have any suitable shape to allow it to adapt to sources of drink, food and air; the shape may cylindrical, for instance.

[00310] Referring now to FIG. **26c**, there is shown a perspective view of a receptacle device **2605c** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention in operation receiving a tube/hose **2609c**. The tube/hose **2609c** is received by a valve **2613c** of the receptacle device **2605c**. In this embodiment, the tube/hose **2609c** is flexible and may be a source of liquid beverage, food or air from a ventilator, for instance. It will be appreciated that any suitable drinking, feeding or

inhalation instrument may be utilized with a receptacle device formed according to the present invention, which drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument may be at least one selected from a straw, a bottle pourer, a spout, a squeeze bottle, a tube, a hose, a nebulizer, a smoking apparatus, an e-cigarette, a vape pen, an inhaler, and a ventilator, for example.

[00311] As used in this document, both in the description and in the claims, and as customarily used in the art, the words "substantially," "approximately," and similar terms of approximation are used to account for manufacturing tolerances, manufacturing variations, and manufacturing imprecisions that are inescapable parts of fabricating any mechanism or structure in the physical world.

[00312] While the invention has been described in detail, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that various changes and modifications can be made and equivalents employed, without departing from the present invention. It is to be understood that the invention is not limited to the details of construction, the arrangements of components, and/or the method set forth in the above description or illustrated in the drawings. Statements in the abstract of this document, and any summary statements in this document, are merely exemplary; they are not, and cannot be interpreted as, limiting the scope of the claims. Further, the figures are merely exemplary and not limiting. Topical headings and subheadings are for the convenience of the reader only. They should not and cannot be construed to have any substantive significance, meaning or interpretation, and should not and cannot be deemed to indicate that all of the information relating to any particular topic is to be found under or limited to any particular heading or subheading. The purpose of the Abstract of this document is to enable the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, as well as readers who are not familiar with patent or legal terms or phraseology, to determine quickly from a cursory inspection the nature and essence of the technical disclosure of the application. The Abstract is not intended to define the invention, nor is it intended to limit to the scope of the invention.

CLAIMS

1. A receptacle device for a mask, the receptacle device comprising:

a valve;

a body portion surrounding the valve; and

an anchor portion;

wherein the body portion and the anchor portion are integrally formed; and

wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel is configured to releasably engage the mask.

2. A receptacle device for a mask, the receptacle device comprising:

a valve;

a body portion surrounding the valve; and

an anchor portion;

wherein at least one of the body portion and anchor portion is configured to engage the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements.

3. A receptacle device for a mask, the receptacle device comprising:

a valve;

a body portion surrounding the valve;

an anchor portion; and

a securing portion;

wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween, and the channel is configured to releasably engage the securing portion; and

wherein the securing portion is configured to engage the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements.

4. A method of manufacturing a mask assembly or retrofitting a receptacle device to a workpiece mask, comprising the steps of:

- providing the mask;
- providing or creating a hole in the mask;
- providing a receptacle device having a valve, a body portion surrounding the valve, an anchor portion, wherein the body portion and the anchor portion are integrally formed, and wherein the anchor portion and the body portion define a channel therebetween;
- pushing the body portion through the hole; and
- engaging the channel with the mask.

5. The method of Claim 4, comprising the steps of:

- providing a securing portion;
- engaging the securing portion with the mask by at least one of plastic joining, adhesive bonding, welding, mechanical fastening, stitching, and magnetic elements;
- pushing the body portion through the securing portion; and
- engaging the channel with the securing portion.

6. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 2 to 3, wherein at least one of the body portion and anchor portion is interchangeable.

7. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 2 to 3, wherein the body portion is moveable between a first position and a second position relative to the anchor portion, optionally wherein movement towards the first position causes generation of a substantially hermetic seal between the anchor portion and the body portion, and movement towards the second position causes breaking of the substantially hermetic seal between the anchor portion and the body portion.

8. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 2 to 3, wherein the body portion and the anchor portion are integrally formed.

9. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 or 3 or method of Claim 4, wherein the channel is a groove.

10. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 3 or method of Claim 4, wherein the valve is configured to receive a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument therethrough.

11. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 3 or method of Claim 4, wherein the valve is a self-sealing valve, optionally wherein the self-sealing valve is configured to generate a hermetic seal.

12. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 3 or method of Claim 4, wherein the valve is hemispherical.

13. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 3 or method of Claim 4, wherein the valve is flexibly suspended from the body portion.

14. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 3 or method of Claim 4, wherein at least one of the body portion and anchor portion comprises gripping ridges or gripping notches.

15. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 3 or method of Claim 4, wherein the valve comprises a slit pattern, optionally wherein the slit pattern generates valve petals.

16. The receptacle device of Claim 15, wherein the slit pattern is configured to conform to the shape of a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument when inserted through the valve, and/or wherein the slit pattern is configured to releasably grip and hold in position a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument when inserted through the valve.

17. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 3 or method of Claim 4, wherein the anchor portion is configured to be substantially flush with an inner surface of the mask, optionally wherein the anchor portion comprises a surface for a user's lips to brace against when inserting a drinking, feeding or inhalation instrument through the valve.

18. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 2, comprising a securing portion that is configured to engage at least one of the body portion, the anchor portion, and the mask.

19. The receptacle device of Claim 18, wherein the securing portion comprises gripping ridges or gripping notches.

20. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 3 or method of Claim 4, comprising a guide portion.

21. The receptacle device of Claim 20, wherein the guide portion comprises a base and a wall, and wherein the wall tapers towards the base, optionally wherein the guide portion comprises a linear or exponential funnel shape.

22. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 or 3 or method of Claim 4, wherein the mask is trapped within the channel to generate a substantially hermetic seal.

23. The receptacle device of any one of Claims 1 to 3, wherein the body portion is configured to protrude through a hole in the mask.

24. The receptacle device of Claims 18, wherein the body portion is configured to protrude through a hole in the securing portion.