

Lay Summary for

Greenhalgh, T., Schmid, M. B., Czypionka, T., Bassler, D., & Gruer, L. (2020). *Face masks for the public during the covid-19 crisis*. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m1435>

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Should You Wear Masks to Prevent Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

Our suggestion is “YES!”

What is this study about?

We did this study to find out if governments should consider the use of face masks as a way to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Why is this study important?

COVID-19 is a serious illness and can spread very quickly. However, there is not a lot of research to know whether face masks can help stop or slow down the spread. And because we also didn't know a lot about COVID-19, different authorities have changed their advice to the public since the start of the pandemic on whether or not to wear masks.

What did we do?

We reviewed health research that tested whether wearing face masks helped to protect people. We also looked at the guidelines and advice from the World Health Organization (WHO) and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to see if there were any recommendations about wearing masks for the general public. In addition, we collected and analyzed papers from other areas of science (like engineering) to get a better picture of why wearing masks in public might help.

What did we find?

We found inconsistencies in WHO's recommendations about whether the general public should use face masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In addition, CDC also just changed its' advice to the public. They now suggest people should cover their faces in public, even though they are not completely sure about the benefits of wearing cloth masks.

Although there is limited real-world evidence on how mask-wearing could help reduce the spread of the virus, we found plenty of other research to support the use of face masks by the general public.

- 1) Face masks can block droplets of saliva
- 2) Using face masks can reduce the risk of getting an infection, and
- 3) Even individuals without symptoms can spread the virus.

What did we decide?

As we face the COVID-19 crisis, there is enough general research that we should not wait until there is more specific and clear research about using masks. Governments should act now and encourage people to wear masks in public.

What are the key messages from this study?



Now is the time for us to act even if the research isn't perfect



Whether masks will reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the general public is open to discussion. They won't hurt, but they probably will help.



Even a simple cloth face mask can prevent the spread of COVID-19 and save lives



Because COVID-19 is such a serious threat, governments should advise masks wearing in public

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