

WHO Reverses Course, Endorses Masks to Fight COVID-19

The World Health Organization now supports the public wearing of masks to prevent the spread of coronavirus. That's a reversal of its earlier position, reports the [*South China Morning Post*](#):

The World Health Organisation says it supports government initiatives that require or encourage the public wearing of masks, marking a major shift from previous advice amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The WHO added that surgical masks should be reserved for medical professionals, while the public should use mainly cloth or home-made face coverings.

The updated stance comes as more scientific research points to the positive effect of wearing masks in preventing the spread of the coronavirus, with more governments in Europe requiring people to cover their noses and mouths in public....Previously the WHO advised that only individuals with symptoms or those taking care of at-risk people should use masks. ...

Only in the last week or so did Austria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic introduce public requirements for people to wear masks in places such as supermarkets.

Last month, I [*recommended*](#) that people wear masks when they go outside, to protect against COVID-19. At that time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was still recommending that the general public not wear masks, but last week it finally [*changed position*](#) to endorse mask-wearing by the general public. As [*The Antioch Press notes*](#):

In a bid to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is now recommending the use of cloth face masks while in public, a

reversal of its prior position in which masks were only recommended for confirmed COVID-19 patients, medical workers and first responders. ... [P]eople are advised to wear a mask in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. ...

Guidelines issued by CDC state that surgical masks or N-95 respirators should not be used in these circumstances.

“Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for health care workers and other medical first responders as recommended by current CDC guidance,” said the CDC.

Cloth face masks that can be made from common household materials are recommended.

Mask-wearing by the general public is one reason why the coronavirus infected fewer people in East Asian countries like Taiwan and South Korea than in Western countries like Italy and Spain. Research shows wearers get some protection from masks, even when they are not medical-grade. More importantly, if you wear a mask, people around you are protected from germs you may be carrying. That includes the coronavirus, which you can be carrying without knowing it.

Some journalists uncritically reported and amplified the false claim that masks do no good. One example was a CNN article last month that trumpeted a government official’s illogical claim that wearing “masks may actually increase your coronavirus risk.” That official simultaneously claimed masks are critical protection for doctors and other “healthcare providers.” How can a mask protect a doctor if it won’t protect an ordinary person? Do masks magically change their protective properties depending on who wears them? But CNN simply parroted the illogical claim, without questioning it, or citing critics who had publicly noted that such claims were

logically [inconsistent](#).

Other journalists mistakenly claimed COVID-19 was less serious than the flu. On March 4, CNN anchor Anderson Cooper [said](#), “If you’re freaked out about the coronavirus you should be more concerned about the flu.” CNN [depicted](#) “fears” of the coronavirus as being “misguided” because “it’s caused far fewer deaths than the flu.” A Washington Post article in February advised [readers](#), “Get a grippe, America. The flu is a much bigger threat than coronavirus.” The Daily Beast [wrote](#) that “coronavirus, with zero American fatalities, is dominating headlines, while the flu is the real threat.” Similarly, Vox [dismissed the risks](#) posed by coronavirus. “Is this going to be a deadly pandemic? No,” it said. “For most people in the US, though, there’s really no reason to worry,” Vox [said](#).

Federal bureaucrats at the CDC and FDA thwarted efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The FDA’s red tape spawned a [surgical mask shortage](#), as Paul Matzko [explains](#) in the New York Daily News.

These bureaucrats also slowed testing for COVID-19, which left America in the dark about how much it had already spread in our country. For weeks, the CDC [required](#) that people use only the coronavirus test designed by the CDC itself, not alternative tests, such as those approved by European regulators. The CDC’s own test turned out to be [badly flawed](#). The CDC’s demand for control over testing greatly slowed down detection of the disease. Meanwhile, the CDC and FDA were preventing infectious disease expert Helen Chu from testing samples from many people with symptoms. The FDA [refused](#) to approve Chu’s test on the grounds that her lab “was not certified as a clinical laboratory under regulations established by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, a process that could take months.”

The World Health Organization also bungled its response to the

coronavirus. Initially, it suggested there was no “evidence of human-to-human transmission” of the virus, relying on false claims made by China’s communist government. Later, it erroneously suggested that transmission from asymptomatic people was “rare,” when in fact it is quite common, as the WHO now admits.

UPDATE, April 7, 4:44 p.m.:

Now, the WHO seems to once again be questioning the value of masks. The WHO was quoted as changing its position in an April 4 news article in the South China Morning Post.

The South China Morning Post quoted this April 3 statement by WHO’s Dr. Michael Ryan, approving of mask use, which was a departure from its past position:

“We can certainly see circumstances on which the use of masks, both home-made and cloth masks, at the community level may help with an overall comprehensive response to this disease,” Dr Michael Ryan, executive director of the WHO’s health emergencies programme, said on Friday.

But on April 6, the WHO issued updated “interim guidance,” containing this statement:

“The use of masks made of other materials (e.g., cotton fabric), also known as nonmedical masks, in the community setting has not been well evaluated. There is no current evidence to make a recommendation for or against their use in this setting.”

The WHO does admit that medical masks protect against coronavirus:

“Wearing a medical mask is one of the prevention measures that can limit the spread of certain respiratory viral diseases, including COVID-19.”

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