

New Yorkers don masks in coronavirus fight

April 3 2020



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From masks and scarves to bandanas and snoods, New Yorkers at the epicenter of America's coronavirus crisis are increasingly covering their faces—as the US government considers urging other citizens to do the same.

With President Donald Trump's administration yet to issue national guidelines, most Big Apple residents are taking the matter into their own hands, heeding Mayor Bill de Blasio's call that they should shield their mouths when outside and near others.

"At first, people thought I was strange, but now everyone has come to my side," said 50-year-old Kristan Kish, who has been wearing a surgical cloth mask since the epidemic exploded here in early March.

She believes it "makes sense" to wear one in an urban jungle.

"By default, you don't know who's walking by you and the sidewalks in New York are narrow," Kish told AFP outside a Manhattan subway station.

After Gwyneth Paltrow posted a photo on Instagram of herself wearing a mask with a breathing valve, 60-year-old photographer Jade Albert rushed to order the same one online.

"As soon as I saw it, I wanted it!" she said, while walking her dog on the Upper West Side, adding she believes it is socially responsible to wear one.

"We have to all do as much as we can," Albert told AFP.

As of Friday morning, the United States had a total of more than 250,000 declared COVID-19 cases and over 6,000 fatalities, according to a running tally by Johns Hopkins University.

New York is Ground Zero in the US's war against the deadly outbreak.

The city of 8.6 million inhabitants has recorded some 50,000 confirmed cases, including 1,562 deaths.

'Mixed messages'

Late Thursday, De Blasio urged all New Yorkers to cover their faces to help stop the spread of the new [coronavirus](#).

But not all are convinced.

City dweller Adam Alvaro said he was unlikely to follow the guidance because of "mixed messages."

"They say 'Wear a mask' one day, 'Don't wear a mask' (the next). The message keeps changing," he told AFP.

Around the same time as De Blasio spoke, Trump told reporters at his daily White House briefing that he was not considering making it mandatory for all Americans.

Vice President Mike Pence added that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would release official guidelines on [masks](#) in the coming days.

Deborah Birx, the coronavirus response coordinator at the White House, said it is important for people to understand that masks do not replace social distancing or hand-washing.

Eddie Marrero, a 58-year-old handyman, is confused by the "contradictory" advice but says he feels safer wearing a mask.

"I am trying to protect me and my family. If everybody protects themselves, it's better for all of us," he told AFP.

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