

Why some people won't wear face masks even if told to

July 8 2020



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The President of the Royal Society has today urged everyone in the UK to wear a face mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Dr. Robby Allen from Cranfield University explains why even if people are told to

they won't always follow sensible advice and regardless of what the medical advice says.

Commenting on why people are refusing to wear [face masks](#), Dr. Robby Allen of Cranfield University, said: "What we are seeing is not a new phenomenon. In the 1960s the psychologist Jack Brehm's work on Reactance Theory established that people have an internal motivation to reclaim their sense of freedom when they feel it is being taken away from them. Reactance theory declares that we each have behavioral freedom and we will often do the exact opposite of what we are asked to do. There is an abundance of science that shows the dangers of smoking, being overweight or indulging in [excessive alcohol consumption](#). Deaths from these are mostly behavior related and largely preventable and there have been many successful campaigns at reducing harmful behavior. However, there is still a core that will wilfully disregard medical advice and do completely the opposite."

Allen continues, "The reason often cited for not taking note of sensible [advice](#) is a reluctance to give up a way of life, a freedom. The level of reactance is theorized to be positively correlated to the relative importance of the threatened [freedom](#). We have seen this in the way many have willingly obeyed the orders of the state and [medical advice](#) as a means of serving the greater good—whilst others have challenged expertise and authority. Those that are more reactant will actively resist rules and regulations and can become self-righteous in their desire for autonomy. They will also often display anger in their desire for autonomy."

Provided by Cranfield University

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