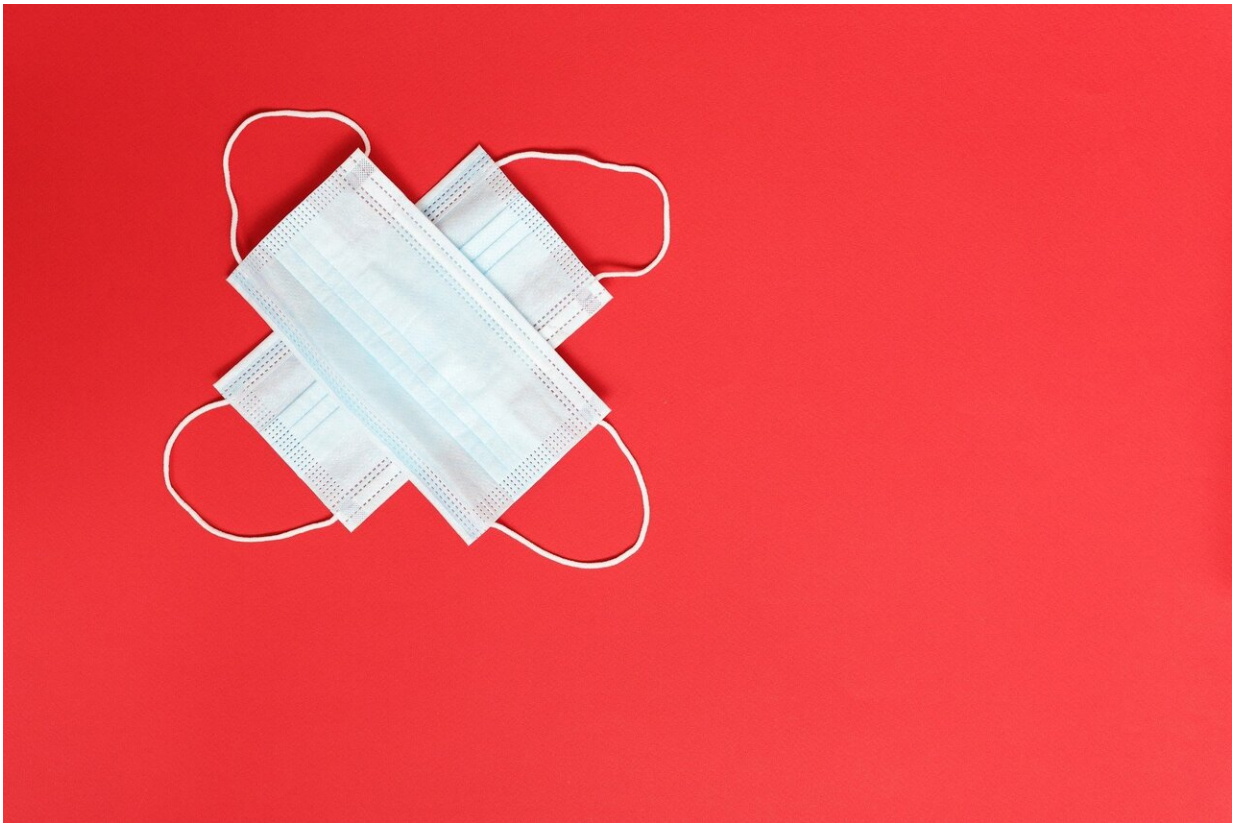


Most Americans wear masks, but myths linger: poll

August 31 2020, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter



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(HealthDay)—Americans are generally well-versed about the use of masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19, although knowledge gaps about face coverings persist, a new HealthDay/Harris Poll reveals.

About nine in 10 Americans said they are knowledgeable about mask-wearing and that they sometimes, often or always wear a mask when they leave their home and are unable to social distance, the online poll shows.

Six in 10 said they always wear a mask in such situations, compared with one in 10 who said they rarely or never do.

Answers to true/[false statements](#) about [masks](#) showed that most folks do indeed have a good understanding of protective masks:

- Seven in 10 knew that most adults can safely wear masks for long periods of time.
- Over two-thirds knew that masks help prevent them from spreading germs to other people, more than protecting them from infection by others.
- Nearly two-thirds knew that all masks are not equally effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

But the fact that a solid minority of Americans still do not understand these basic concepts is troubling to Kathy Steinberg, vice president of Public Release Research at The Harris Poll.

"It's encouraging to see the vast majority of Americans say they wear a mask or face covering when they go out," she said. "Most Americans report feeling knowledgeable about the use of masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19. And while, indeed, majorities were able to correctly identify some basic truths and [best practices](#), many have misconceptions about other key mask facts."

For example, only 45% of respondents knew that masks do *not* cause a potentially harmful buildup of carbon dioxide (CO₂), Steinberg noted.

About 28% considered the CO₂ myth to be true, and 26% weren't sure, the poll showed. These folks are more likely to forgo a mask out of fear for their health.

Dr. Amesh Adalja is a senior scholar with the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, in Baltimore. He said, "The survey findings underscore the need for much better information on the use of face coverings and the evidence supporting them. It is understandable that the general public is going to have a suboptimal understanding of [face coverings](#) given the mixed messaging that has been occurring."

The poll showed that political differences tend to crop up regarding the wearing of masks to fight COVID-19.

Republicans were more likely to believe the CO₂ myth—about 40% compared with 20% of Democrats and 25% of Independents.

Overall, about four in five respondents agreed that masks are the best defense against COVID-19, and even more (86%) said donning a mask shows they care about the health and safety of others.

At the same time, however, three in 10 said masks do little to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The percentage of Republicans holding this view was 38%, compared with 19% of Democrats and 27% of Independents. Respondents between 18 and 44 years of age (39%) and men (31%) were also more likely to feel this way.

About 37% of Republicans said no American should ever be required to wear a mask or face covering, again about twice as many as Democrats (18%) and more than Independents (23%), the poll showed.

Dr. Teresa Murray Amato, chair of emergency medicine at Long Island Jewish Forest Hills, in New York City, reviewed the [poll](#) results. She

said, "During the COVID pandemic, many Americans have been wearing masks as recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, without a federal, state or local mandate, parts of the country are without a clear guideline."

Amato added that "the majority of those polled indicated that they would like companies to mandate mask wearing and have clear policies to enforce the use as well."

The survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll between Aug. 20 and 24, among 2,057 adults aged 18 and older in the United States.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [wearing face masks](#).

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