

Significant minority of people are not correctly masked for COVID-19 in Kentucky indoor areas

July 28 2021

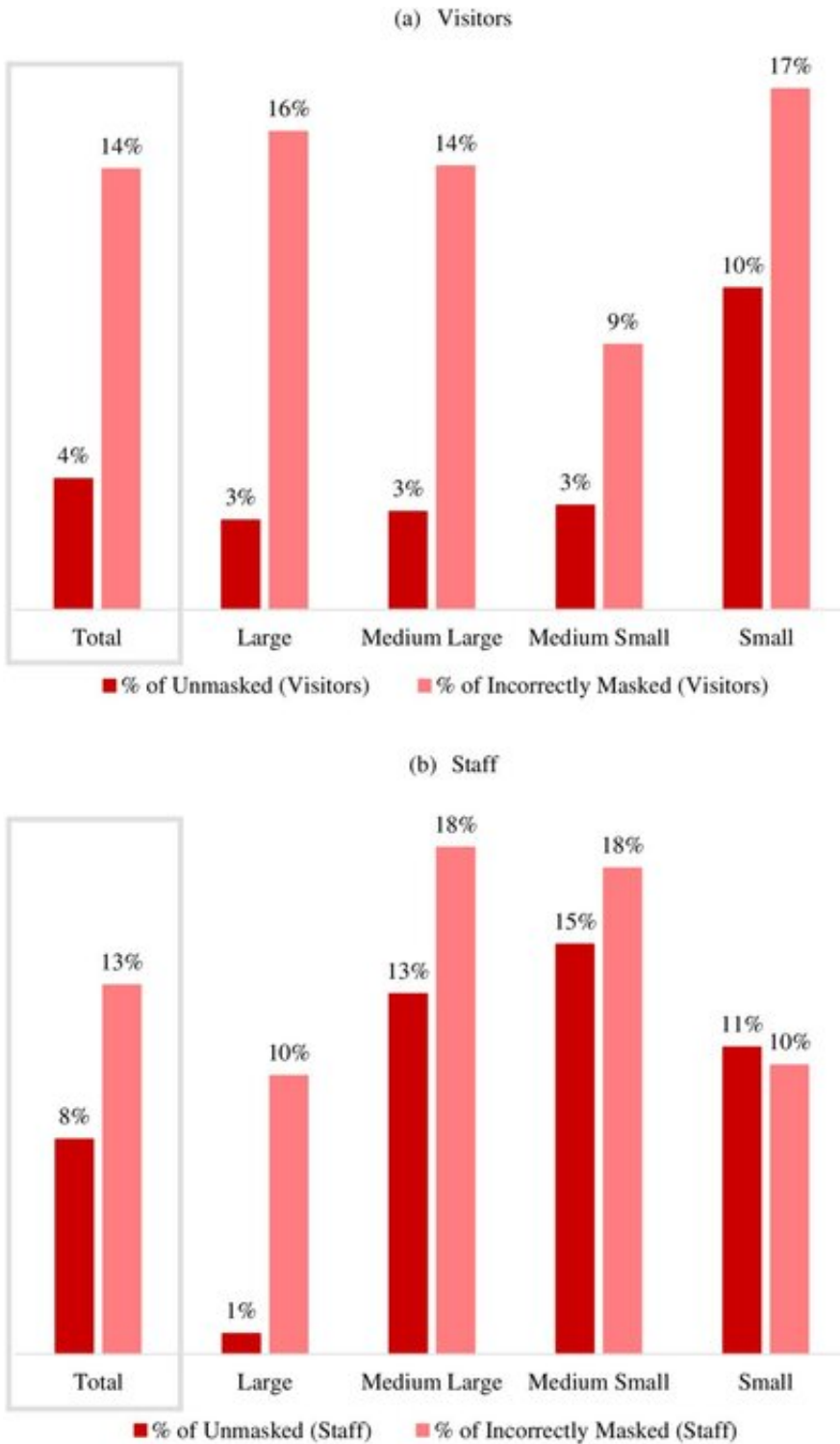


Fig 1. The average prevalence of the unmasked and improperly masked among visitors and staff of Louisville indoor public areas by public area size, Dec. 14–20, 2020. Large PAs are those with a square footage of at least 5000, between 2500 and 4999 sq ft for medium large, 1500 to 2499 sq ft for medium

small, and 1499 or less for small. Credit: Karimi et al, 2021, PLOS ONE (CC-BY 4.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Where mask-wearing to protect against COVID-19 is mandated, a small proportion of visitors and staff in indoor public areas either do not wear them or wear them improperly. Research published in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* found that in December 2020, 4 percent of visitors and 8 percent of staff in retail trade stores in Kentucky did not wear a mask, and 14 percent of visitors and 13 percent of staff wore them improperly.

Public health campaigns have emphasised the importance of mask-wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic; understanding real-world behaviour and practices can help with future policies and communications. Seyed M. Karimi and colleagues at the University of Louisville, Kentucky, USA, where a state-wide mandate was implemented in July 2020, logged observations of mask use behaviour in 382 randomly selected retail trade stores. Ten trained observers logged the prevalence of proper facial mask use as well as incorrect use, as effectiveness is limited if a mask is not used properly. 2,080 visitors and 1,510 staff were observed during one week in December 2020 at the peak of the pandemic in the United States.

There was variation in the proper use of [masks](#) depending on the size of the store, with visitors and staff in larger stores more likely to wear a mask, and to wear it correctly. Furniture, home improvement and equipment outlets had the highest compliance, and food and [grocery stores](#) saw more unmasked and incorrectly masked visitors and staff than other outlets. Districts with the highest prevalence of unmasked and improperly masked individuals were among the most economically disadvantaged districts of the city. Finally, of the observed visitors and

staff, male middle-aged adults were the group most likely to be unmasked or improperly masked.

Karimi adds: "Mask use and proper mask use rates were lower in Louisville City districts with [lower income](#), in smaller public areas, and in food and grocery stores. The majority of the observed unmasked persons were male and middle-aged."

More information: Karimi SM, Salunkhe SS, White KB, Little BB, McKinney WP, Mitra R, et al. (2021) Prevalence of unmasked and improperly masked behavior in indoor public areas during the COVID-19 pandemic: Analysis of a stratified random sample from Louisville, Kentucky. *PLoS ONE* 16(7): e0248324. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0248324

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