

Is there still a benefit to masking?

5 May 2022, by Iqbal Pittalwala



Credit: Stan Lim, UC Riverside

With California coronavirus cases rising—the state has recently been recording about 5,600 coronavirus cases a day—should you be masking up when people around you are not? Can you go unmasked everywhere? How best can you protect yourself?

Epidemiologist Brandon Brown at the School of Medicine at the University of California, Riverside, shares his thoughts on mask wearing and when, if at all, we might be mask-free. Brown is an associate professor in the Department of Social Medicine, Population, and Public Health.

Q. How protected am I if I wear a mask but others around me do not?

When others around you are not wearing [masks](#), a well-fitted mask will provide you with real protection against [infection](#), but the amount of protection depends on whether you are indoors or outdoors, the size of the gathering you may be at, and whether people near you have COVID symptoms. One important word to remember is consistency when it comes to wearing a mask, as a mask only helps you when you use it and do so correctly.

Q. Are there particular places, such as poorly ventilated offices, or events, such as packed concerts, you recommend people mask up at all times?

Masks slow the spread of COVID. Yes, I recommend masking indoors when around others, including at the office. Masking is important at concerts and when in large crowds. I still recommend wearing a mask anytime that you are able to when around others outside your household. Masks prevent more than COVID, and the next COVID surge could be around the corner.

Q. When drinks and snacks are served on flights, just about everyone unmask. At restaurants, people often mask (or are required to) when walking up to their tables, but then they immediately unmask when they sit down. How safe are these behaviors where COVID is concerned?

Wearing a mask is safer than not wearing one, and everyone has their own sense of perceived risk. With highly transmissible variants, limited space in public transportation and in restaurants forces you to sit close to others, making transmission more likely, particularly when you remove your mask. But having mask rules in these settings, even if you take it off for eating/drinking is a good reminder that COVID still exists.

Q. When do you think we will be safe enough to be mask free?

I think everyone must determine their personal level of safety and risk and what that means, but the pandemic is not over yet, infections continue, and current surges elsewhere in the world point to a high likelihood of another surge in the United States.

Provided by University of California - Riverside

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