

## Relaxing the COVID-19 Mask Mandate: “Is It a Sign of near Normalcy or Precursor to Future Surge?”

Rupa Potti

*Department of Nursing, Chicago State University, IL, United States of America*

**\*Correspondence to:** Dr. Rupa Potti, Department of Nursing, Chicago State University, IL, United States of America.

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### Abbreviations

Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), COVID-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE).

### Introduction

Ever since the SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has taken the world by spin, mitigation measures have been implemented to control the transmission of this disease. The SARS-CoV-2 is transmitted by the infected person’s respiratory droplets through coughing, sneezing, talking, and even breathing or any other activity which will cause the respiratory droplets to be generated. Per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), using a face mask is a very efficient way of preventing the SARS-CoV-2 virus [1].

### Background

Taking the public health guidelines into consideration, some of the measures put in place to mitigate the transmission were stay-at-home, mask mandates, social distancing, contact tracing, and quarantining the exposed [2]. Evidence shows that using a mask will prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from both

symptomatic and asymptomatic clients affected with COVID-19 and will also protect the wearer from contracting the illness to some extent [3]. Evidence supports that using a mask in public places will prevent SARS-CoV-2 infectious respiratory droplets from traveling in the air and getting transmitted to others [1].

## Discussion

Individual studies regarding these measures including mask mandates were conducted and the results showed a considerable decrease in the incidence of COVID-19. A study conducted in Montana among the Blackfeet Tribal Reservation, with approximate 10,629 population, showed a decrease in cases to 0.19 on November 7, 2020, from 6.40 cases per 1,000 residents per day on October 5, 2020 [3]. In Delaware, mitigation strategies were added in phases to prevent the spread of COVID-19 from March 11, 2020. To control the spread of COVID-19 disease, stay-at-home was implemented from March 24, 2020, to June 1, 2020; mask mandates were initiated from April 28, 2020, and contact tracing was started on May 12, 2020. Analysis of the data showed a considerable decrease in COVID-19 infections with the implementation of the mask mandate [2]. In a study conducted in Montana after the implementation of limited mask use on July 15, 2020, and inconsistent mask use across the state, there was a considerable increase in COVID-19 incidence with a peak on November 14, 2020, with 1.54 cases per every 1,000 residents and the numbers came down drastically after the mask mandate was re-implemented from November 17, 2020 [3]. Another study was conducted from the data collected from 50 states and the district of Columbia. The data was collected from John Hopkins University, "COVID-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering" (CSSE), and the data about the social gatherings was collected from "University of Washington GitHub dataset". The data analysis showed that the states who implemented the mask mandates three to six months and after six months had higher incidence rates of 1.61 and 2.16 respectively compared to states who implemented the mask mandate within one month [4].

Further evidence of the efficacy of masks in mitigating the SARS-CoV-2 is seen in the data analysis of the mask mandate in 24 counties in Kansas. It was noted that the COVID-19 seven-day rolling average incidence per 100,000 decreased by 0.08 cases per 100,000 which is a decrease of 6% with mask mandate while the counties which opted out of the mask mandate saw a rise in 0.11 cases per 100,000 which is a net increase of 100%. There was a decline in cases after the masks were mandated. The same trend was seen in 15 states and the District of Columbia which saw a decline in cases after the mask mandate was implemented [5].

## Conclusion

With the COVID-19 vaccines and booster doses, we are gradually reverting the mitigation methods we used to control the disease. But with the rise in COVID-19 cases as of November 11, 2021, it is important to consider the future surge which may affect the global communities. It is imperative to consider if the vaccines alone are sufficient to limit the disease or if the congruent mitigation measures which worked in the past should be reinstated to have better control over the surging disease. As we move forward towards a better and healthier future as a global community, we need to reconsider the thought of relaxing the mask mandate and implementing it in conjunction with the vaccines for obtaining near to normalcy soon.

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## Conflicts of Interests

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