

Research [in] Brief

Understanding Consumer Attitudes: Face Coverings to Help Reduce COVID-19 Transmission



Primary issue

Policymakers are exploring ways to reduce the number of novel coronavirus infections without resorting to broad-based economic shutdowns. A variety of evidence suggests that face coverings can help reduce the spread of the virus; however, face coverings' effectiveness in regard to avoiding another shutdown depends on widespread use, and not everyone is wearing them.



Key findings

The vast majority of respondents to the Cleveland Fed's recent survey regarding face coverings indicated that they were likely to wear a face covering if required by a government authority. Older individuals and individuals who believed that face masks were effective in reducing the transmission of the coronavirus were more likely to wear them in response to a government mandate than younger individuals or those who did not believe they were effective.

Individuals who reported that wearing a face covering makes them less likely to follow social-distancing guidelines were less likely to wear one if required by local authorities compared with the group that did not see a tradeoff between wearing a face covering and social distancing.

Of those people who hadn't recently worn a face covering in a public setting, such as a store, one-third would have done so if they were provided for free when entering.



The bottom line

Face coverings have the potential to reduce the spread of COVID-19 without greatly disrupting economic activity—if they are widely used.

Additional research on the benefits of wearing them and clearly communicating these findings to the public would help to increase the use of face coverings and slow the spread of COVID-19. Understanding why some people are wearing them and why some aren't can help policymakers design measures that will effectively increase their use.

