

Fact-Checking Mask Usage and COVID-19 Infection Rates

The Claim: CDC reported that the majority of those infected with COVID-19 ‘always’ wore masks.

To evaluate this claim, we’ll apply Michael Caulfield’s **Four Moves and a Habit** :

1. **Check for previous work:** We researched this claim on **Snopes** and **FactCheck.org**, both of which identified the claim as false and misleading.
2. **Go upstream to the source:** The claim originates from a CDC study titled, “Community and Close Contact Exposures Associated with COVID-19 Among Symptomatic Adults ≥ 18 Years in 11 Outpatient Health Care Facilities” (https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6936a5.htm?s_cid=mm6936a5_w). The study found that 85% of the participants reported wearing masks ‘always’ or ‘often’. It highlighted that mask use was similarly high among those who tested negative for the virus. The CDC clarified that the high rate of mask usage does not negate the potential for infection during activities where mask use is impractical, like eating or drinking.
3. **Read laterally:** The CDC’s Science Briefs state that “individual prevention benefit increases with increasing numbers of people using masks consistently and correctly” (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>). Dr. Anthony Fauci also mentioned, “Masks aren’t perfect. They help, but they’re not a guarantee that you’re not going to get Covid if you wear a mask.”
4. **Circle back:** If overwhelmed by conflicting sources, revisit the claim. Consider the bias of the sources like **The Federalist**, which is positioned far right on the AllSides Media Bias Chart (<https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-chart>). Question the accuracy of self-reported data, as there was no video monitoring to verify mask usage.

Check Your Emotions: The politicization of mask usage and the pandemic can influence perceptions and reporting. President Trump’s minimization of the pandemic’s severity contributed to the politicization of public health measures like mask wearing.

Conclusion: The CDC did not report that the majority of those infected with COVID-19 ‘always’ wore masks.

For more insights on debunking COVID-19 myths using Michael Caulfield’s **Four Moves and a Habit**, visit the COVID Vaccines Libguide (<https://libguides.lib.cwu.edu/COVID/myths>).

Reference: CWU Disinformation Case Studies - <https://libguides.lib.cwu.edu/c.php?g=625394&p=4391900>