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BREAKING

Most Americans Think N95 And KN95 Masks Are The Most Effective—But They Aren't Wearing Them, Poll Finds

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TOPLINE More Americans think that N95 and KN95 masks are effective against Covid-19 than believe the same of surgical or cloth masks, but they wear them less, a new Harris [poll](#) suggests, highlighting the importance of the White House's rollout of free N95 masks to make them more accessible.



A woman wearing a face mask walks on a street in New York City on Jan. 19. XINHUA NEWS AGENCY VIA GETTY IMAGES

KEY FACTS

- The [poll](#), conducted January 21-23 among 2,120 U.S. adults, found 86% of respondents believe N95 and KN95 masks are protective against the spread of Covid-19.
- That's higher than the 75% who believe surgical masks are effective and 55% who say cloth masks are protective (68% if the mask includes a filter).
- However, only 29% said they actually wear a N95 or KN95 mask, versus 33% who wear a surgical mask and 36% who use a cloth mask.
- Some 62% of respondents said they'd wear the higher-quality masks "if price and availability were not an issue."

BIG NUMBER

400 million. That's how many free N95 masks the Biden administration will [distribute](#) through pharmacies and community

health centers. Masks started becoming available last week shortly after the program was announced, and White House Covid-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said Wednesday the initiative will “hit full strength” over the next few weeks, with “tens of thousands” of sites distributing masks across the country.

KEY BACKGROUND

N95, KN95 and KF94 [masks](#)—high-quality respirators regulated by the U.S., China and South Korea, respectively—have become increasingly important amid the rapid spread of the omicron coronavirus variant. It is highly transmissible, and experts [say](#) cloth masks and surgical masks are less effective against it. (Surgical masks are made of a better quality material than cloth masks, but aren't as well-fitting as N95s.) An increasing number of businesses, governments and schools have updated their mask rules to [require](#) better-quality masks as a result, with places like Utah's Salt Lake County [requiring](#) people to wear respirator masks indoors and Los Angeles mandating employers provide them for workers and [barring](#) children from wearing cloth masks in school.

TANGENT

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [says](#) Americans should “wear the most protective mask you can, that fits well and that you will wear consistently,” but the agency has resisted calls to recommend people wear N95 or KN95 masks—even as its website [notes](#) they're more protective when worn properly.

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