



Opinion: Wearing masks must become mandatory

OPINION | July 2, 2020

By Nancy Ouyang

We must support mandatory mask-wearing — yes, potentially with fines — for everyone in Georgia. This should be a no-brainer. One: Mask wearing is shown to reduce coronavirus transmission rates. Two: Asymptomatic individuals can transmit the virus. Three: Masks are far, far cheaper than the other interventions we're doing.

At least 18 states already require wearing masks, according to Masks4All. In fact, the first state to do so, New Jersey, mandated it on April 10th. Having a statewide mandate may be controversial. Why does mask-wearing need to be mandatory across the state, even in rural areas? In rural areas, there are plenty of gatherings with more than enough people to spark an outbreak: grocery stores, funerals, churches, etc. Severe outbreaks can happen anywhere people crowd indoors.

Regardless of any vocal minority, according to recent polls, a large majority of Americans support mandating wearing masks in public (and many are doing so already). Ending our shutdown with the outbreak still ongoing has cost American lives. We should all wear masks to help lower the death toll and end the outbreak. Wearing a mask demonstrates commonsense respect for our neighbors, the employees of essential businesses, and in the end, for our emergency responders and healthcare workers as well.

Why fines? Fines are controversial no doubt. The logic behind fines is straightforward: the federal and state governments are already paying thousands of dollars on average per person in the CARES act, unemployment, and other measures. By intentionally choosing to not wear a mask, people are saying their right to do so is worth that much to them, and should be willing to pay a fine.

The intentional part is important. This fine should only be phased in after a full public service education campaign. (The campaign can even be fun — in other countries, public transit employees have released dance videos about COVID-19

safety).

We should remember that a fine will deter the poor more than the rich, so there should be free and easy ways to get a mask (as in Utah). One possibility: Police departments have a bad rep right now, in particular among the same minorities disproportionately dying from the epidemic. To help build trust again, police officers could help pass out masks or deliver instructions for making a mask (these directions from the CDC use just scissors and any old t-shirt, and other websites cover effective materials).

Making masks mandatory will help us get closer to universal mask-wearing, which is what we need to control our outbreak. Once it becomes normal, wearing a mask will seem so trivial and something we barely think about, like making sure we have our keys when we leave the house. We have broken so many cultural norms in a short time (for example canceling entire sports seasons), let's build a new one together.

A quick caveat: Note that wearing a mask helps, but isn't a bulletproof vest against spreading the virus. We must stay vigilant about physical distancing, hand-washing, and other commonsense measures.

Let's all do our part to get back to a normal life more quickly.

For those of us with a responsibility to lead the public: mandate mask-wearing, and make sure we all understand why.


For individuals: wear a mask, proudly and patriotically. Ask your friends and family to do so too.

Nancy Ouyang earned her master's degree in computer science from Harvard University and her bachelor's degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is currently researching robotic manipulation while pursuing her Ph.D. She was born in Atlanta and raised in Duluth, where she has returned during this pandemic.



Atlanta. News. Now.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Sign up for our newsletters 

About



Contact Us



Subscriptions



Products



© 2020 [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#). All Rights Reserved. By using this website, you accept the terms of our [Visitor Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policy](#), and understand your options regarding [Ad Choices](#).

Learn about [Careers at Cox Enterprises](#).