

It Looks Like Americans are Starting to Ignore Mask Mandates; Good

We're still hearing a lot about "mask mandates" in COVID-19 era America, but my experiences (and those of acquaintances) over the last few days suggest that the supposed mandates have functionally become mere advisories.

In my opinion, that's a good thing. Generally speaking, we're all better off when personal health decisions are left to individuals than when government presumes to make those decisions for everyone.

Many Americans began voluntarily donning masks when "public health authorities" were still yelling at us not to, and drastically reducing our outings and interactions before governments started trying to put us all (well, all of us toffs who could stay home and watch Netflix while "essential" peons delivered our groceries) under house arrest. Policy is a trailing, not leading, indicator.

Grain of salt warning: "The plural of the word anecdote," Kenneth Kernaghan and P. K. Kuruvilla wisely noted in 1982, "is not data." I'm not equipped to conduct a nationwide, well-controlled, peer-reviewed study on the subject. I can only tell you what I've noticed and what others I know have seen.

New Mexico blogger Kent McManigal notes at "Hooligan Libertarian" that, although that state's government has re-imposed its previous mask mandate, about 25% of shoppers seem to be ignoring it, and that stores aren't hassling those shoppers about it.

I follow the news closely by profession, but I didn't even notice when my county's government (Alachua County, Florida) re-imposed its mask mandate. My wife mentioned it to me just as we were about to walk into our neighborhood grocery store.

I didn't have a mask with me, and was about to return to the car, when I noticed two things: First, the store hadn't put up signs at the door advising shoppers of the re-imposed mandate. Those signs had been there throughout the first mandate. Second, looking through the door, I could see unmasked shoppers inside, and nobody appeared to be giving them any trouble. So I just went in. My experience matched Kent's. More than half the shoppers were masked, but nobody gave the unmasked so much as a cross look.

On our next outing, I brought a mask with me, just in case.

At one store, the proprietor had been clear through the pandemic that it was not his job to enforce county mask mandates. The county government sign wasn't back up, and the "masks optional" sign still was. I shopped unmasked without incident.

At another, the county government sign WAS up, but I saw not a single employee, and only a few customers, wearing masks. When in Rome ...

A third store had its own — not government-printed or referencing any law — “masks required” sign. I masked up, went inside, and noticed that most (not all) customers were complying, and that nobody was beating anyone up over it.

I don't much care whether people choose to wear masks or not. If it makes you feel better, knock yourself out.

But it's good to see Americans deciding for themselves instead of just doing as they're told.