

# Researcher examines why people choose to wear face coverings

19 December 2020

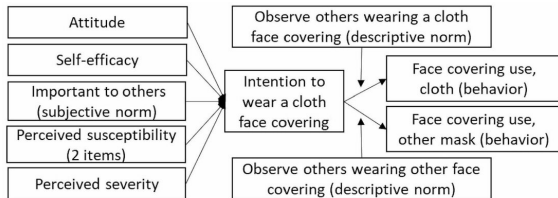


Figure 1. Theoretical model of assessed paths for face covering use in public.

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Wearing a face covering in public is dependent upon how often people observe others wearing them, according to recent findings. Other important motivating factors are among findings of a national study undertaken by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through lead author Jack Barile, interim director of the Social Science Research Institute in University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's College of Social Sciences. More than 1,000 U.S. adults, ages 18 and older, who are representative of the U.S. population by gender, age, region, race/ethnicity and education, were surveyed.

"In this study, we examined what motivators are behind an individual's choice to wear or not wear a face covering in public," Barile said. "This understanding is critical to developing successful messaging strategies to encourage acceptance and use of face coverings to prevent the

transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19."

The study suggests that being female, perceived importance of others wanting the respondent to wear a face covering, confidence to wear a face covering and perceived importance of personal face covering use were all factors positively associated with intention to wear a face covering in public.

No evidence was found that a perceived susceptibility to becoming ill and a perceived severity of COVID-19 correlated with an increase in the intent to use a face covering in public.

"The survey allowed us to explore both the barriers and facilitators to the public's use of face coverings, as well as to identify possible pathways through which the use of face coverings while in public could be increased among the U.S. population," Barile said. "Based on our findings, it is possible that messaging strategies that focus on susceptibility to and severity of COVID-19 may not be as effective as targeting actions that influence individual intentions and [social norms](#)."

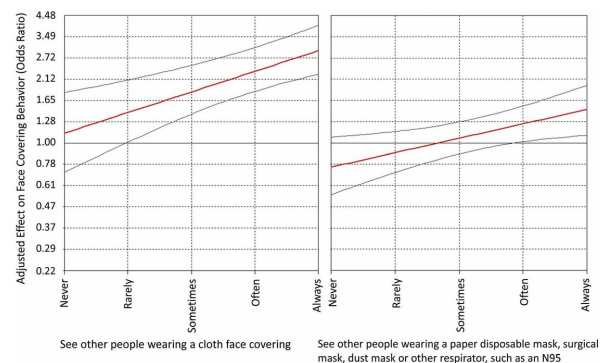


Figure 2. Johnson-Neyman plot.

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Barile noted that, while distributions of the first vaccine to prevent COVID-19 have begun in the U.S., [health officials](#) predict that it will be months before the vaccine is readily available to all individuals who seek it.

"This makes mask wearing in public, especially when social distancing is difficult to maintain, an essential component in the continuing effort to reduce the virus' transmission," he said.

The study was published in the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, the Society of Behavioral Medicine's flagship journal. It publishes original empirical articles on behavioral medicine and the integration of biological, psychosocial and behavioral factors and principles.

**More information:** John P Barile et al, Theory-based Behavioral Predictors of Self-reported Use of Face Coverings in Public Settings during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States, *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/abm/kaa109](#)

Provided by University of Hawaii at Manoa

APA citation: Researcher examines why people choose to wear face coverings (2020, December 19) retrieved 16 March 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-people.html>

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