

Are masks effective at reducing transmission of COVID-19?

Results of a rapid systematic review

What did we do?

We reviewed all available research evidence about the effectiveness of masks, different types of masks, and mask mandates in reducing transmission of COVID-19 in community settings.

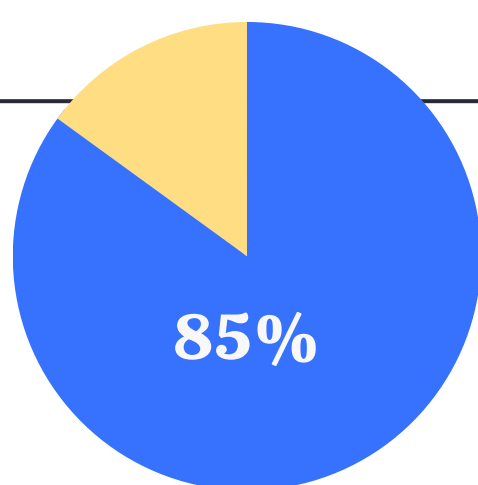
We closely reviewed 307 studies of masking

We excluded 272 studies because they didn't address our review question

We included 35 studies that addressed our research question

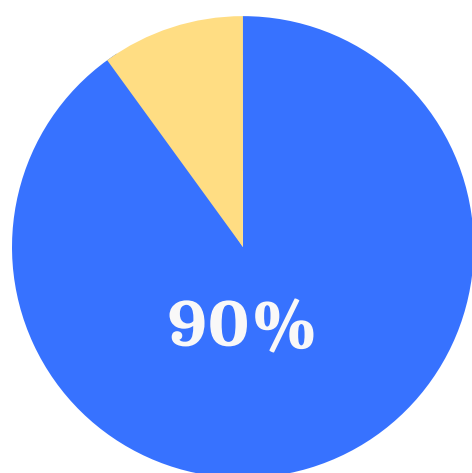
What did we find?

24 of the included studies looked at mask use and COVID-19 in general. 85% of them favoured the effectiveness of masks.



4 studies compared types of masks, and their findings were mixed.

- 2 studies (including 1 RCT) found medical masks were more effective at preventing COVID-19 than non-medical masks
- 1 study reported no difference between medical and non-medical masks
- 1 RCT compared medical masks with and without a face shield, and there were very few COVID-19 cases in both groups



10 studies evaluated mask mandates. 90% of them favoured the effectiveness of mask mandates.

The study that did not favour mask mandates only reported on 2 people infected before and 2 people infected after the mandate was launched.

Things to keep in mind

Research in the real world

These studies took place in the real world, where people can do many things at once to reduce COVID-19 risk (like quarantining and physical distancing). This makes it hard to know how much of an effect masks have on their own.



Challenges confirming mask use

How people wear their masks is important. Most studies had people answer surveys about if they wore masks or not, but researchers were not able to check if masks were worn or fitted correctly and consistently.

Who did this research and who funded it?

This review was conducted by an experienced group of researchers at Dalhousie University in collaboration with two Patient/Public Partners. The work was funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada.