



To mask or not to mask; that is the question.

"Masks are safe. Masks help prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. Masks have helped save countless lives. Masks are political. Masks are a sign of compliance with authority. Masks are patriotic. Masks cannot prevent the wearer from getting the Coronavirus. Masks are a symbol of love and respect for our fellow citizens. The science says that masks are saving lives and we must keep wearing them."

Which of the above statements are true and which ones are false? Answer: take your pick. It all depends on a number of factors, but...

The fact is that there is no one, conclusive, indisputable scientific study that is uniformly agreed-upon by researchers, scientists or medical professionals that proves that mask-wearing is 100% effective in either reducing the spread of the Coronavirus or protecting the wearer from contracting it.

If there were such a study, the CDC and other organizations along with the White House would be screaming it from the rooftops. If you don't believe me, do your own Internet search on the science behind mask-wearing. You'll find broad disagreement on the subject. And by the way, the anti-mask proponents are not conspiracy theorists or Republicans and/or Conservatives. You'll find them throughout the political spectrum.

I'm sorry if that fact doesn't fit neatly within your frame of reference or insults your political views on the subject, but that happens to be the case. The other important fact is that assertions - even those made by sincere and well-meaning people in positions of power or authority - should not be regarded as unassailable truths. Unfortunately, assertions (opinions) have become the *new* truths of our age and we who are actual truth-sleuths must spend an inordinate amount of time trying to separate the gossip from the gospel in order to turn back the growing tide of conventional wisdom (opinion) that is masquerading as facts.

In my humble opinion, mandated mask-wearing has become one of the tools that our government is using to exert and maintain power over the population. I will not speculate on the reasons why because they're too scary to contemplate.

Suffice it to say, the mask has become the new symbol of tacit compliance and agreement with the ideology of the power elites. In some ways, masks are like the armbands worn by the National Socialists of the thirties in Germany. Like the armband, the mask signals you are a believer, one with the prevailing policy and a supporter of the ideology. Mask-wearing has become inextricably linked to a broader philosophy of political and social *collectivism*. This undergirds the movement away from protecting the rights of the individual and cedes control of those rights to government so that it can steer us all in the 'right' direction towards the spirit of the 'common good.' Granted, this philosophical disagreement has always been part of the great American cultural conversation, but it has become weaponized of late when the Left discovered it could be used to justify 'protecting' us from making those *tedious decisions* for ourselves.

Mask-wearing should be an option any citizen can choose just like wearing ear muffs in the Winter or Bermuda shorts in the Summer. If you want to wear one, yourself, or even two as the President is espousing, by all means do so if it makes you feel better. And if you want to keep your distance from me when I'm not wearing one, I will not be offended because I respect YOUR rights. Show me the same courtesy by respecting MINE and we'll all get along just fine.

Stephan Helgesen is a retired career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in 30 countries for 25 years during the Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush Administrations. He is the author of ten books, four of which are on American politics and has written over 1,100 articles on politics, economics and social trends. He operates a political news story aggregator website, www.projectpushback.com. He can be reached at: stephan@stephanhelgesen.com