

Europe's Top Health Officials Say Masks Aren't Helpful in Beating COVID-19

The top medical experts in the world can't decide if masks are helpful in reducing the spread of COVID-19 or just make things worse.

By [Jon Miltimore](#) | Thursday, August 6, 2020



From left to right: Professor Henning Bundgaard, Tamara van Ark, Anders Tegnell | Composite image by FEE (Rigshospitalet, Wikimedia Commons)

Denmark boasts one of the lowest COVID-19 death rates in the world. As of August 4, the Danes have suffered 616 COVID-19 deaths, **according to** figures from Johns Hopkins University.

That's less **than one-third of the number of Danes who die from pneumonia or influenza** in a given year.

Despite this success, Danish leaders recently found themselves on the defensive. The reason is that Danes aren't wearing face masks, and local authorities for the most part aren't even recommending them.

This prompted *Berlingske*, the country's oldest newspaper, to complain that Danes had positioned themselves "to the right of Trump."

“The whole world is wearing face masks, even Donald Trump,” *Berlingske* **pointed out**.

This apparently did not sit well with Danish health officials. They responded by noting there is little conclusive evidence that face masks are an effective way to limit the spread of respiratory viruses.

“All these countries recommending face masks haven’t made their decisions based on new studies,” said Henning Bundgaard, chief physician at Denmark’s Rigshospitale, **according to Bloomberg News**. (Denmark has since **updated its guidelines** to encourage, but not require, the use of masks on public transit where social distancing may not be possible.)

Denmark is not alone.

Despite a global stampede of mask-wearing, **data show** that 80-90 percent of people in Finland and Holland say they “never” wear masks when they go out, a sharp contrast to the 80-90 percent of people in Spain and Italy who say they “always” wear masks when they go out.

Dutch public health officials recently explained why they’re not recommending masks.

“From a medical point of view, there is no evidence of a medical effect of wearing face masks, so we decided not to impose a national obligation,” **said** Medical Care Minister Tamara van Ark.

Others, echoing statements similar to the US Surgeon General from early March, said masks could make individuals sicker and exacerbate the spread of the virus.

“Face masks in public places are not necessary, based on all the current evidence,” **said** Coen Berends, spokesman for the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment. “There is no benefit and there may even be negative impact.”

In Sweden, where COVID-19 deaths have **slowed to a crawl**, public health officials say they see “no point” in requiring individuals to wear masks.

“With numbers diminishing very quickly in Sweden, we see no point in wearing a face mask in Sweden, not even on public transport,” **said** Anders Tegnell, Sweden’s top infectious disease expert.

What’s Going on With Masks?

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