# Study Finds Face Masks Ineffective Against Covid Amid Omicron Variant Dominance



### Study Finds Face Masks Ineffective Against Covid Following Emergence of Omicron Variant

A new study from the University of East Anglia (UEA) has found that face masks, which provided significant protection against Covid-19 up until early 2022, have since become ineffective. The study, led by infectious disease specialist Professor Paul Hunter, re-analyzed data from more than 100,000 people regarding their habits and Covid test results during the pandemic.

The study's findings indicate that face masks reduced the risk of infection by approximately 30% throughout 2021. However, this protective effect disappeared by February 2022 when the Omicron variant became dominant in the UK and later in the US. Researchers suggest that Omicron's increased transmissibility made face masks less effective.

The research drew data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Covid survey in England, covering the period from November 2021 to May 2022. Factors such as mask-wearing habits, foreign travel, household size, employment status, and contact with various age groups were analyzed to determine their impact on infection rates.

Dr. Julii Brainard of UEA’s Norwich Medical School, a co-author of the study, stated that the results were "not totally surprising" due to Omicron's enhanced ability to infect the upper respiratory tract. The findings underscore the need for ongoing evaluation of public health measures as virus characteristics evolve.

Other studies have shown mixed results regarding mask efficacy. A global review of 78 studies involving over a million people found surgical masks reduced the risk of catching Covid or similar illnesses by just 5%, a figure that may not be statistically significant. Additionally, mask mandates in schools seemed to only delay infections rather than prevent them.

The study highlights that, albeit somewhat effective against earlier variants of Covid-19, face masks became less useful as Omicron spread. This shift underscores the need for adaptable public health strategies in response to evolving pathogen characteristics.

Professor Hunter emphasized that these results likely apply beyond the UK, stating there are no intrinsic differences that would limit their relevance elsewhere. The findings suggest prudence in assuming previously effective measures will remain so throughout an evolving pandemic.