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Cumberland Advisors Commentary -Forrest Gump's Advice

David R. Kotok

Mon Jun 15, 2020

I wish all readers a good Sunday morning. I have to be more sobering today than I have been in recent Sunday missives.

Below is a quote from POLITICO, issued on Thursday morning, June 11, 2020, at about 8:30 AM.

“VP MIKE PENCE visited a TRUMP/PENCE campaign office and posted a photo of the staff standing shoulder to shoulder without masks — an image they later deleted after an outcry.” (POLITICO Playbook: Trump’s latest zigzag,” <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/playbook/2020/06/11/trumps-latest-zigzag-489493>)

Pence's tweet was seen by many Twitter users, some of whom took screenshots, before it was deleted. Here is a link to one screen capture: https://twitter.com/steve_vladeck/status/1270888440536748033. Please note that the person posting the tweet is an accomplished Texas lawyer.

I don't understand who makes these political decisions. Let's get to what we know about masks?

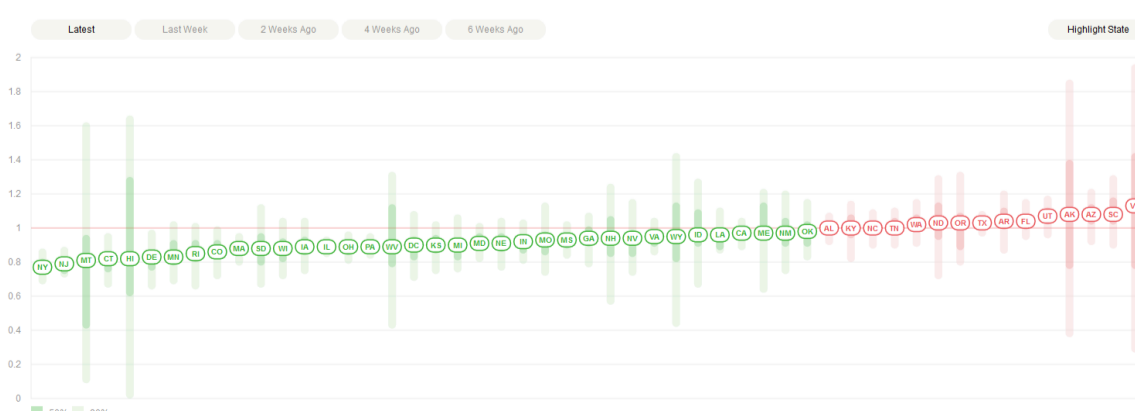
1. In jurisdictions where mask wearing is ubiquitous (in many places it is required, and violators are punished), the incidence of COVID-19 infections and deaths is lower than it is in places where mask wearing is optional.
2. The mask can be cloth or a disposable surgical type and doesn't have to be a carefully fitted N-95 mask. Either way of covering nose and mouth creates a barrier (not perfect, but something) to transmission of the aerosolized virus.
3. The mask serves two purposes: It protects the wearer to some degree, and it protects others from the wearer to a greater degree. If everyone is wearing a mask, chances of the virus spreading are reduced by 75%. If all the measures we take drop the R0 for this virus to less than one, we beat COVID-19 over time. As this is written on June 12, 2020, the R factor is rising in many states and is above 1 in 19 of them. If you go to the <https://rt.live> website, you can see a daily updates by state and you can compare the state with last week, two weeks ago, four weeks ago and six weeks ago.
4. The cost of a mask is minor (U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Jerome Adams, demonstrates how to make one at home in 45 seconds: <https://youtu.be/tPx1yqvJgf4>). On the other hand, the COVID-19 risk for some people is serious illness or death.

R_t Covid-19

These are up-to-date values for R_t, a key measure of how fast the virus is growing. It's the average number of people who become infected by an infectious person. If R_t is above 1.0, the virus will spread quickly. When R_t is below 1.0, the virus will stop spreading. [Learn More](#)

S/20 model update: some states' R_t have changed because we improved our testing volume adjustments.

Data Last Updated: 6/11 at 12:29PM



So why isn't everyone just wearing a mask all the time in public? Is it arrogance? Vanity? Is it a political statement? On whose behalf? With what purpose? (COVID-19 is neither Democratic nor Republican! It's a mindless virus infecting new hosts wherever it can.) Meanwhile, Bloomberg and AP report (June 12) that attendees at Trump rallies are being asked to sign a waiver so they will not sue POTUS campaign if they get COVID-19.

Is a refusal to wear a mask, as Forrest Gump said, "Stupid is as stupid does"?



My friend Peter has asked me to write from time to time about my worldwide travel experiences. He asked what really struck me about a particular place or event. He was looking for some light and entertaining travel experiences. He has traveled with me to some exotic places. Peter, I'm coming with another thought or two later, but today here is the first one and sadly it is not light but serious.

I have both traveled in countries where everyone wears a mask when an epidemic threatens. I wore them just like everyone else. We see those countries with lower rates of COVID-19 destruction. In the US we see the opposite. This makes no sense unless our population just wants to have more people sick and more people dead. I won't comment about the examples set by political leaders. Their behavior speaks for itself.

On this Sunday, I will go outside my front door as I do every day. I will wash my hands and put on a mask. I will add a little disinfectant to enhance the barrier. I won't take that mask off until I return home and enter my front door. Then I will wash my hands, and only after washing them will I take off the mask. When I am out, I will try to NEVER put my hands higher than my shoulders. I will try to avoid touching my face. If I must remove the mask when I am out, I will disinfect my hands first; and after doing what I must do with mask off, I will disinfect again and put the mask back on. I will wear reusable rubber gloves if doing any shopping or touching. I will wash the gloves when I come home. I will wipe everything I touch with a disinfectant cloth that I carry with me inside a plastic bag so it doesn't dry out. If I enter a store or a food establishment or any other vendor's place of business and I see an employee without a mask, I will walk out. I will try to tell the proprietor or manager why I'm leaving. I will try to stay outside for the most part and will try to make any visits to inside spaces as brief as possible. Eating is for outside or at home. Entering a food establishment requires surveillance, and I walk out if I see an unmasked person in the back or in the kitchen. If the customers are mostly unmasked and crowded together, I will walk out. Unfortunately, that is increasingly the case.

Every experience outside my front door is risky. Every encounter outside with people is risky. Every crowd is risky. I live in Florida. We are "opening up." We are watching case counts spiking in some jurisdictions. We are watching, and we are worrying. Our ICU units are again filling up. Our professional medical community is worrying about a surge. We just set a new record case count daily rate.

The entire country is on a path to open up. Whether we like it or not, political will is committed to that path. People are now required to take full responsibility for their own personal safety. The evidence supporting mask wearing is well-known. Our political leaders refuse to admit the evidence is correct which is why a mask is optional, recommended but optional.

What each of us does now is up to us. "Stupid is as stupid does," but being careful will save lives. If many of us choose to be careful, we can perhaps limit not only the human costs of COVID-19 but some of the economic impact as well.

For your Sunday reading, we offer two recent studies regarding masks and a guide by Taylor DesOrmeau about the COVID-19 risk levels associated with various everyday activities .

"Wearing a surgical mask can reduce coronavirus transmission by up to 75 percent, study says," <https://www.foxnews.com/health/wearing-face-mask-reduce-coronavirus-transmission-75-percent-study-shows>

"Widespread mask-wearing could prevent COVID-19 second waves: study," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-masks-study/widespread-mask-wearing-could-prevent-covid-19-second-waves-study-idUSKBN23G37V>

"From hair salons to gyms, experts rank 36 activities by coronavirus risk level," <https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2020/06/from-hair-salons-to-gyms-experts-rank-36-activities-by-coronavirus-risk-level.html>

Please be careful and have a safe Sunday.

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