



## COVID-19 KNOWLEDGE HUB—Fighting the COVID-19: 100 Q&As

# Question 1 Why Are Healthy Chinese Wearing Face Masks Outdoors?

Gong Sen

March 2020

After the outbreak of COVID-19, the Chinese experts recommended the public wearing face masks in the epicenter of the outbreak or during the public gatherings outside the epicenter. In reality, however, most localities require that all people should wear the face masks in public places. I think there are four major factors for the Chinese people to accept the requirements of wearing the face masks outdoors.

First, ideally only patients need to wear face masks. However, in reality since many cases have no symptoms or mild symptoms, it is hard to know who are infected, not to say to ask them to wear face masks. According to a Japanese testing on all the Japanese citizens evacuated from Wuhan, China to Japan, 41.6 percent of all passengers testing positive for COVID-19 had no symptoms. Another research on the 72,314 confirmed cases conducted by China Center of Disease Control (CDC) suggests that there were 889 cases without symptoms, accounting for 1.2 percent of all the confirmed cases.

Second, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for the general public to keep appropriate social distancing in many public places because of heavy population density. In Hubei Province, the epicenter of the outbreak in China, there was about 60 million population in 2019, roughly the same as that in Italy. The land area in Hubei, however, is only about 61 percent of that in Italy.

Third, some of the infected would not wear face masks because wearing masks only benefits others rather than themselves. The single most important purpose for the infected to wear masks is to prevent others from infection. However, it is the infected who are bearing all the costs such as breathing difficulty, purchasing expenditures and even discrimination. Thus, the infected may



中国国际发展知识中心

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL  
KNOWLEDGE ON DEVELOPMENT

have no incentives to wear face masks all the time. All people wearing masks could ensure engagement of the infected and self-protection of the healthy.

Besides, all people wearing masks could reduce the risk of aerosol transmission. Although aerosol transmission is not proved yet, its possibility has not been ruled out either.

Last but not the least, the Chinese society widely follows the requirement of wearing masks because of its confidence in production capacity. China has demonstrated its capacity to meet all the demands on face masks in a short period of time. Within a single month of February 2020, for example, the daily production capacity and real production of face masks increased 4.2 times and 11 times respectively in China. On March 2, both the capacity and the actual production for face masks exceeded 100 million per day, which could meet the demands of both the frontline medical staff members and the general public.

**Gong Sen** is Executive Vice-President of CIKD.

Working Papers are also posted at <http://www.cikd.org>. The author(s) may be contacted at [info@cikd.org](mailto:info@cikd.org)