

# Are New Yorkers Wearing Masks? Here's What We Found in Each Borough

Over several days this summer, The New York Times tallied the face-covering status of over 7,000 people at 14 spots across the city.



By Andy Newman

Published Aug. 20, 2020 Updated Sept. 10, 2020

By now, everyone knows the drill: Wear a mask. It saves lives.

And yet, not everyone does — especially men.

In New York City, those ignoring the mask rule are nearly twice as likely to be men as women, The New York Times found in a mask census of over 7,000 people, conducted across the city at 13 street corners and one beach boardwalk.

The mask rule Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo handed down on April 15 leaves some room for interpretation. It requires that those over age 2 who can medically tolerate covering their mouths and noses do so “when in a public place and unable to maintain, or when not maintaining, social distance,” which is understood as six feet from other people.

But if you walk by someone and happen to pass within four feet for a split second, does that count as being “unable to maintain” social distance? Who knows. At the corners where we did our counts, sometimes people were closer than six feet apart. Sometimes they weren't.

But in almost every place, more men than women were walking around unmasked — usually a lot more: At some corners, the gender gap approached 25 percentage points.

---

## SEE THE RESULTS OF OUR COUNT

**Manhattan:** East Village, Harlem | **Brooklyn:** Brownsville, Ditmas Park, Park Slope | **Queens:** Corona, Astoria, Far Rockaway, Flushing, Jamaica, Rockaway Beach | **The Bronx:** Fordham Manor, Mott Haven | **Staten Island:** St. George

---

Men were also considerably more likely than women to be wearing their masks in a kinda-sorta way — nostrils peeking over, mask under chin, mask dangling from one ear strap.

Setting aside these partial mask-wearers, and those holding masks in hand — all of whom arguably deserve some credit if they mask up fully when approaching a crowd — the numbers boiled down to this: Nearly one in three men were walking around unmasked, while only about one in six women were.

Damir Otovcevic, 53, an out-of-work waiter sitting on a bench in Astoria, Queens, with his mask around his chin, was surprised to hear it, but he was quick to offer a possible reason.

“Probably they have to be macho. They don’t want women to see them cover their faces,” he said. “Like how they show the muscles — the same thing.”

The Times’s enumerators — aided by Melody S. Goodman, a biostatistician and associate dean at New York University’s School of Global Public Health (see the methodology box at end of this article) — found that mask-wearing varied widely by neighborhood.

The street corners with the highest prevalence of mask-wearing were in Flushing, Queens, and Park Slope, Brooklyn, where over 95 percent of people were masked.

The lowest were scattered around Brooklyn, Manhattan, Staten Island and Queens, all in the low-to-mid 60s. On a sultry evening on the boardwalk in Rockaway Beach, only 20 percent of passers-by were enjoying the fresh salt air through a mask.

James Estrin/The New York Times

Across the country, masks have become a flash point — a badge that liberals and conservatives wear (or don’t wear) on their faces — with some Republican leaders refusing to impose mask rules. But even in a blue city like New York, there are mask resisters.

During the survey, conducted over a stretch of stiflingly muggy days at the end of July when extracting oxygen from the air felt like an effort even with mouth and nose unimpeded, we asked dozens of unmasked people, men and women alike, why they weren't masked, and got dozens of answers. Some were more solid than others.

It's too hot. It's hard to breathe. I wear one all day at work. The straps dig into my ears. No one is near me right now. I don't have the coronavirus. The danger of infection has passed.

"I get allergies, it itches my nose and sometimes when my body gets super hot, my nose bleeds," said Frances Hampton, 36, a social worker walking in Brownsville, Brooklyn.

Antoine Rogers, 35, a basketball referee, walking barefaced through Far Rockaway, Queens, dismissed reports of the virus as government propaganda.

"If you're telling me I can't breathe God's air, this country is bent over!" he said.

Here are the results of our survey, neighborhood by neighborhood. The figures exclude those who were partially masked:

## Flushing, Queens

### **Main Street and Sanford Avenue**

**99 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 100 percent**

**Men: 98 percent**

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

People in Flushing do not mess around.

In over an hour in the blistering noonday sun on a packed sidewalk not far from the Flushing-Main Street subway stop, The Times saw only six entirely unmasked people out of almost 500 pedestrians, and only one unmasked woman.

And unlike all the rest of the locations, which had substantial numbers of partially masked people, only 4 percent of people in Flushing were partially masked.

Dr. Goodman, the biostatistician, said that in some immigrant-heavy neighborhoods, the culture of the home country seemed to affect mask-wearing rates. The ZIP code of this location is more than 70 percent Asian-American, mostly Chinese.

“Culturally in America, at least in my lifetime, I’ve never been asked to wear a mask before, but people in other countries may have,” she said. “Anecdotally, I saw a lot of Asian people wearing masks before we were mandated to.”

## Corona, Queens

### **National Street near Roosevelt Avenue**

**86 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 85 percent**

**Men: 88 percent**

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

At the start of the virus crisis in New York City, Corona and surrounding neighborhoods emerged as the epicenter. Mexican and Ecuadorean workers, often living in crowded housing, were among the hardest hit groups. The 11368 ZIP code in Corona has had the most cases in the entire city, and more than 4 percent of residents have tested positive.

On July 30, a bustling block off Roosevelt Avenue, lined with vendors selling everything from quesadillas to homemade yogurt to leather sandals, was a sea of masks, mostly the disposable blue ones. Even little children wore them, including several who also wore baggy, adult-size surgical gloves.

“It’s the No. 1 best way to protect myself — and protect other people, too, of course,” said Ana Vicente, who was out for a fruit juice with her 4-year-old daughter.

## Astoria, Queens

### **Broadway and Steinway Street**

**86 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 90 percent**

**Men: 81 percent**

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Rifat Milky was dismayed to see the news stories last month showing Broadway and Steinway Street in Astoria thronged with maskless revelers partying outside bars on weekends.

“That’s where if you’re not wearing a mask, you’re in trouble, said Mr. Milky, 24, a pharmacy intern.

Rifat Milky Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Still, on a sweltering morning, there was Mr. Milky walking past the same corner, unmasked.

“I just came from physical therapy. When you do that, you’re covered up,” Mr. Milky said. As he was putting his mask back on, he explained he was just “taking a little break.”

He added: “As an intern I’m wearing a mask 24/7. This is probably the only time you’ll catch me without one.”

## Brownsville, Brooklyn

### **Pitkin Avenue and Chester Street**

**67 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 75 percent**

**Men: 54 percent**

Kesha Collado does not worry about the virus.

“It’s like a bad cold — if your immune system is strong enough, you can survive,” she said.

“It’s a lot of old people that die, not a lot of young people, you know.”

As she stood on a shaded sidewalk near Bargain Land Discount Center and foot traffic filed by steadily, she was not wearing a mask. She said she seldom wore one.

Antoinette Irons Laylah Amatullah Barrayn for The New York Times

Around the corner, Antoinette Irons, 54, said she never left home without a mask on — “to be safe, to keep myself safe and to keep others safe.” Ms. Irons explained that she worked for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority: Over 130 of her colleagues have been killed by the virus.

**Ditmas Park, Brooklyn**

**Newkirk and Coney Island Avenues**

**79 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 88 percent**

**Men: 70 percent**

Amr Alfiky/The New York Times

“I respect masks. I love masks,” Julie Abadir, 39, said. “When I go anywhere, I put it on. If I go inside a store, I have to wear a mask; in the subway I have to wear a mask. But outside in the streets? Why do I have to wear a mask in this weather?”

## East Village, Manhattan

### **St. Marks Place and Second Avenue**

**77 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 84 percent**

**Men: 72 percent**



The intersection of St. Marks and Second was sluggish in the heat of a Tuesday afternoon. Several unmasked men shuffled past a corner, asking for money. Two police officers crossed the street, masks hanging from their uniforms.

An older man walking his dog approached several people in masks, gestured to the weather and said, “Must be hard wearing a mask out here.” He added, “You know that’s just to take down Trump?”

Danny Goodman, 30, who works in finance, said as he waited to cross the street, “There are certain scenarios that call for a mask.” Some more people approached the corner, and Mr. Goodman pulled a mask out of his pocket and strapped it on.

“Personally, I don’t mind people not wearing masks,” he said. “Just don’t cough on me, I won’t cough on you.”

## Far Rockaway, Queens

### **Beach Channel Drive and Mott Avenue**

**62 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 70 percent**

**Men: 55 percent**

Far Rockaway, a relatively poor neighborhood at the city's edge near Kennedy Airport, was devastated by the virus. In its ZIP code, 373 people have died of it — the second-highest total in the city and more than in 11 different states.

At Beach Channel Drive and Mott Avenue, a broad intersection along a commercial strip, only about 55 percent of men and 70 percent of women were masked, among the lowest figures we found.

“To see people not wearing masks — did we forget what we just came through?”

— Damara Lee, 43

The virus has ebbed in Far Rockaway, as it has across the city, though some unmasked people said they doubted it ever existed.

Rafael Martinez James Estrin/The New York Times

Rafael Martinez, 33, a home health aide, said he thought the pandemic was made up. “Of course it’s a conspiracy” Mr. Martinez said. “Hell yeah, everything is a conspiracy.”

Melissa Browy James Estrin/The New York Times

Melissa Browy, 21, an Amazon worker, said she walked around with extra masks.

“If I see someone without masks, I give them away,” Ms. Browy said. “That’s the only thing I can do.”

## Fordham Manor, the Bronx

**East Kingsbridge Road and Morris Avenue**

**77 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 85 percent**

**Men: 70 percent**

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Danny Enrique, an Uber Eats worker, came out of Texas Chicken and Burgers with a delivery order. He was not wearing a mask.

“When I feel like surrounded, or too crowded, I’ll put it on,” Mr. Enrique, 21, said. “Like this restaurant — if there were a lot of people in there, I’d put my mask on.”

He said he always made sure to put the mask on when he delivered an order. “You’ve got to,” he added. “You can’t go to a person’s house unless you’re wearing a mask.”

“When lockdown lifted, I feel like everybody got a lot more lenient.”

— Kristopher Gonzalez, 15

Kristopher Gonzalez, 15, was headed into the restaurant to pick up a snack for his cousin. He was barefaced, too.

Kristopher said that when the virus hit the Bronx hard in April, nobody left his apartment without a mask and gloves. His mother came down with Covid-19 but recovered. “In the beginning, we were scared,” he said.

But as New York flattened the curve, Kristopher’s family relaxed. “Around mid-May, we stopped wearing masks all the time,” he said.

## Harlem, Manhattan

**Malcolm X Boulevard and West 124th Street**

**66 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 79 percent**

**Men: 56 percent**

Amr Alfiky/The New York Times

“We’re in Stage 4,” said Denise Kingsberry, 56, who was unmasked, referring to the current phase of the city’s reopening, which lifted many restrictions. “I feel like it’s over with, basically.”

## Jamaica, Queens

**Parsons Boulevard and Jamaica Avenue**

**75 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 87 percent**

**Men: 62 percent**

September Dawn Bottoms/The New York Times

A family strolled past the busy corner of Jamaica and Parsons, past fast-food joints and a closed cinema. The woman and child wore masks. The man did not. A few minutes later, the scene repeated itself with a different family.

So went a prevalent pattern at this location, which was virtually tied for the biggest gap in mask-wearing between men and women.

Dr. Goodman has done some survey work that found that nationwide, women self-reported higher mask-wearing rates than men.

“I don’t know why, but women are, sort of, a little bit more scared,” she said. “They’re taking this a lot more seriously and doing more of the recommended guidelines, including not going outside: ‘Not going outside but when I do go outside, I’m more likely to wear a mask, and more likely to wear a mask correctly.’”

## Mott Haven, the Bronx

**East 149th Street and Morris Avenue**

**85 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 91 percent**

**Men: 76 percent**

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Bobby Garnes finished his maintenance shift at McDonald's, tucked his mask into his shirt pocket and hit the street. "I really have to keep it on so long at work, and when I get outside it's uncomfortable," Mr. Garnes, 26, said. Besides, he said, "The strings cut into my ears."

A few minutes later at the same spot — a corner flanked by a check-cashing place, a storefront law office and the hulking Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center — Hilly Williams explained why he always wore a mask outside the house.

Hilly Williams Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

“I know 17 people who died,” said Mr. Williams, 61, a laid-off carpenter. “It’s pretty real.”

“They need air-conditioning in this thing.”

— Leroy Washington, 71

“As long as I’m outside, I keep it hanging down,” Leroy Washington, 71, who suffers from asthma and pulmonary disease, said of his mask.

Leroy Washington Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

# Park Slope, Brooklyn

## Seventh Avenue and Union Street

**97 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 98 percent**

**Men: 95 percent**

Amr Alfiky/The New York Times

“Would you mind, please, social distancing properly?”

The question was directed at a masked Times reporter and photographer as they approached a line of a dozen people waiting to be let into the Park Slope Food Coop, a place long famed for its progressive orthodoxy and adherence to rules.

On a corner of Seventh Avenue, the neighborhood’s main shopping street, Nancy Sperling, a retired administrative assistant, was one of very few people strolling by unmasked. She had an alibi.



“I’m eating ice cream!” Ms. Sperling said, waving a strawberry shortcake pop.

## St. George, Staten Island

### Stuyvesant Place and Hyatt Street

**66 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 68 percent**

**Men: 65 percent**

Mosta Kim, 21, an Amazon worker, goes unmasked when he’s outdoors and off the clock. He said he presumed, and assumed others did, too, that anyone without a mask was making a public declaration that they did not have the coronavirus.

“You’re OK, you’re not sick,” he said as he walked along Stuyvesant Place across from Staten Island Borough Hall, on a hill overlooking the ferry terminal.

September Dawn Bottoms/The New York Times

At the same time, Mr. Kim said he felt a little uncomfortable when he saw clusters of unmasked people and tried to steer clear of them. “It does put a little bit of fear in you,” he said.

Fatimah Ojesanmi, 32, a high school teacher, said that for her, the choice to wear a mask all the time outdoors was a simple one: “If I can wear a mask and protect myself and others, why not?”

## Rockaway Beach, Queens

### **Boardwalk near Beach 116th Street**

**20 percent wearing masks**

**Women: 24 percent**

**Men: 16 percent**

In some ways, a boardwalk at the beach is not much different from a city street. People walk past one another, sometimes passing close, sometimes not. But judging by the stretch near Beach 116th Street in Rockaway Beach, there is something about strolling on the boardwalk that makes people let down their guard, and their masks.

One of the few masked people, Andrew Zinn, 61, noticed the parade of bare faces as he sat on a bench in the early evening. “Not good, basically,” said Mr. Zinn, who lives in an assisted-living building nearby.

A 19-year-old named Cristian had taken the subway from Harlem to go to the beach with three friends. Only one of the four wore a mask. Cristian, who declined to give his last name, barely offered an excuse.

“Mine is somewhere in my book bag,” he said, “and I’m too tired to look for it.”

---

## Methodology

The mask survey was conducted July 27-30, between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. The heat index (a combination of temperature and humidity) during survey times ranged from 86 to 97 degrees.

At each location, the enumerator tallied between 340 to 567 people (excluding partially masked people), enough for a margin of sampling error of less than 5 percentage points, which was calculated by Melody S. Goodman, associate dean for research at N.Y.U.’s School of Global Public Health.

People were considered partially masked if they had a mask visible on their person, including in their hand, but had at least one breathing orifice uncovered. We counted only pedestrians, not people traveling by bike or skateboard. We included people who were eating, drinking or smoking.

We did not ask what gender people identified as and sorted them based on their apparent gender. Because the number of people of one gender was smaller than the overall number at a location, the one-gender numbers have larger margins of error — up to 8 percentage points. Nevertheless, in nine of the 14 locations, the gap between male and female mask-wearing was statistically significant, meaning it was bigger than the margin of error.

Across the 14 locations, and excluding partially masked people, 75 percent of people were masked — 69 percent of men and 82 percent of women. Of the total of 7,545 people, 23 percent of the men and 17 percent of the women were partially masked. These are not to be taken as representative citywide figures, however, because our counts were not conducted at random locations; we chose locations in part because they had relatively high pedestrian density. The true citywide mask-wearing prevalence is presumably lower.

Reporting was contributed by Elisha Brown, Jo Corona, Annie Correal, Wadzanai Mhute, Derek M. Norman, Nate Schweber and Daniel E. Slotnik.