

Does wearing a face mask make you seem more or less trustworthy?

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Researchers at Swinburne University of Technology have found that the correlation between face masks and perceptions of trustworthiness may be linked to social norms rather than how they impact appearance.

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, the wearing of [face masks](#) became normalized, but this has now worn off. As Australians enter flu season, are individuals who are opting to wear face masks as a preventative measure trusted more or less?

Lead by [social psychologist](#), Dr. Julian Oldmeadow, the Swinburne study tracked perceptions of trustworthiness for masked, unmasked and covered faces over time. In total, 373 Australian participants were surveyed across 2020, 2022, or 2023. The study is [published](#) in the journal *Perception*.

"People tended to trust masked faces more than unmasked faces, at least during the height of the pandemic. This boost to trustworthiness has now worn off, so that faces covered with a mask now are at least no more trustworthy-looking than unmasked faces, and perhaps even somewhat less trustworthy."

"The positive effects of masks seen during the pandemic appear to be temporary, based on pandemic-specific [social norms](#) around wearing masks to protect yourself and others. But outside contexts where masks are normative, we tend to prefer and trust unmasked faces more, perhaps because we feel we can get a better read on someone when we can see their whole face."

More information: Julian A. Oldmeadow et al, Masks wearing off: Changing effects of face masks on trustworthiness over time, *Perception* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/03010066241237430](https://doi.org/10.1177/03010066241237430)

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