

Anti-maskers: A group of people whining so much over something so little

Opinion by Daryl Austin

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(CNN) I don't judge someone by whom they vote for, what team they cheer for or how they like their steak cooked. But few things make me lose respect for a person faster than learning they're an anti-masker. I have not arrived at this opinion lightly; as I write this, my home state of Utah just shattered a record by [reporting](#) 3919 new cases of Covid-19. As tragic as that milestone may be, it doesn't surprise me. Everything I have witnessed from the anti-mask community in my state makes this all too predictable.



Daryl Austin

First came the embarrassing anti-mask protest in St. George, Utah, in August, which the rest of the nation thought was a [real-life "Saturday Night Live" parody](#) skit. Next came the visceral social media attacks against a [Utah epidemiologist for pleading with people to wear a face mask](#): She was mocked in comments and across multiple social media platforms for [saying](#) that doctors "are very tired." Then came an [announcement](#) in October from Utah Gov. Gary Herbert saying law enforcement had to be deployed to protect public health officials after anti-maskers planned protests at state epidemiologist Dr. Angela Dunn's home. And finally, Herbert's own son, Brad Herbert, had to [plead with people on Facebook](#) to stop protesting in front of his father's personal residence after the governor [declared](#) a state of emergency and statewide mask mandate on Sunday night.

Every end-of-world movie has that character who refuses to accept the reality of their dire situation. (Think "Dante's Peak," "2012," "The Day After Tomorrow" or "Independence Day.") That character who has you jumping up and down screaming, "STOP LISTENING TO THAT GUY!" He's the character who argues against every practical countermeasure while the threat of destruction creeps closer and closer until every option previously on the table is gone.

Enter the modern-day anti-masker: The guy who not only forgets to thank public officials for working tirelessly to keep him and his loved ones safe but who also doesn't seem to grasp that local government leaders can only do so much.

And the options on the table for public officials are rapidly disappearing. If the hospitals in my home state reach capacity, it's game over. Schools and businesses will have to close. Lockdowns will become inevitable. What anti-maskers don't seem to understand is that debating how deadly Covid-19 is or is not isn't the point at all.

Preventive measures have always been about doing whatever it takes to avoid [overwhelming our hospitals](#) and frontline medical professionals and thereby saving lives. If we fail to take these measures, this story will have a terrible, tragic ending, with treatment no longer available to those suffering the worst symptoms. The consequences of our inaction will be catastrophic.

Gov. Herbert understands all of this, and he said as much when he declared a state of emergency in Utah.

He said my state is already turning away new out-of-state cases from Nevada, Idaho and Montana. He [said](#) Utahns are likewise being turned away from hospitals in surrounding states like Colorado.

Hospital administrators know what the overwhelming number of new cases actually means, and they are planning accordingly. Over a month ago, Dr. Emily Spivak of the University of Utah's School of Medicine disclosed that the intensive care unit of the hospital she works at had already reached 95% capacity. "We are maximizing the system." she [said](#), "It is a marker of things getting worse."

When she made that statement, Utah's number of new daily cases [had just hit](#) 1501. That number has only climbed every day since then, [surpassing 2000](#) and [2500 many times over](#) and hitting nearly [4000](#) new cases on Thursday.

The lava is flowing down the mountain, the final eruption could happen at any minute, and still the anti-maskers are marching on.

They find obscure videos "proving" that masks are dangerous and share them with their friends on Instagram. They take [words out of context from a US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report](#) to try to show – against all evidence – that Covid-19 isn't that dangerous after all. They deny every study, disregard every credible doctor and disbelieve every scientific explanation. Like anti-vaxxers, anti-maskers become fixated on the 0.001% anomaly and make that the front-and-center issue of their anti-science campaign while ignoring everything else. Mask deniers remind me of when the "Friends" TV show character Ross [freaks out](#) after discovering that "condoms only work, like, 97% of the time!"

Of course, face masks don't provide the perfect protection against the novel coronavirus; no one ever said they did. But that doesn't mean it makes any sense to deny their effectiveness altogether.

Logic and reason have been replaced with misinformation and hysteria. No, [wearing a mask](#) is not going to deprive your brain of oxygen. No, wearing a mask in public for a few months longer is not

giving up your rights as a free American. And no, wearing a mask is not only about protecting yourself against infection.

The CDC [makes clear](#) that masks are proven to protect the wearer, but they [also say](#) that "masks are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected." In other words, wearing a face mask is about protecting both oneself and demonstrating a willingness to protect others nearby.

Wearing a mask is really no different than being willing to cough into your elbow or cover your sneeze with a tissue. Can you imagine someone actually protesting their right to be able to sneeze into the air while surrounded by other people? Ridiculous.

I've never known a group of people to whine so much over something so little. When I think of the sacrifices my father's and grandfather's generations had to make during WWII and compare them with the sacrifices my generation has been asked to make during this pandemic, it's laughable.

We're being asked to cover our mouths and noses around other people to protect ourselves and others because we know many of the people infected with the virus are asymptomatic. "COVID-19 can be spread by people who do not have symptoms and do not know that they are infected," [says the CDC](#). Multiple [clinical studies](#) prove that face coverings [reduce the transmission of droplets](#) that may leave the wearer anytime they open their mouth or exhale through their nose.

It's really that simple. Wearing a mask is not a political statement and not wearing one doesn't mean you know something the rest of us don't. It's a sign of selfishness and proof of willful ignorance and nothing more.