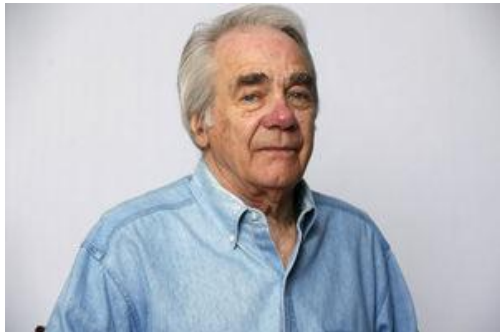


Opinion: What Is It About Being Directed to Wear Faces Masks that So Infuriates Some People?

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There are those who go unmasked as 'a statement they will not stand by idly while government tells them what to do even if it places lives at risk'



Carl Golden

What is it about being directed to wear a face mask when out in public to protect oneself and others from an incurable virus that so infuriates and offends some people they belittle and berate those around them, assault store clerks and generally make fools of themselves for the millions who view their cell-phone-recorded antics on YouTube?

Surely they recognize a pandemic that has ravaged the country, sickened more than 4 million people, killed another 150,000, crashed the economy, shut down businesses many of which will never reopen, closed schools and placed a resumption of classes in significant doubt, and overloaded hospitals?

Yet, even as public health and medical experts estimate that wearing face masks can reduce the infection spread by 65%, there are those who swagger their way through public spaces unmasked as a sign of their unchallenged individuality, a statement they will not stand by idly while government tells them what to do even if it places lives at risk — theirs and others.

Some bellow loudly that a face mask mandate places their constitutional rights under attack while for others it's a manifestation of a natural contrariness toward all things governmentally mandated. That their actions show gross disrespect and disdain for others seems to have escaped them.

Their arguments are similar to those heard decades ago in opposition to a requirement that motorcycle riders and passengers wear protective helmets and that drivers and passengers in motor vehicles wear seat belts.

Looking for the freedom to bash their skulls

When the mandatory helmet law was under consideration in the New Jersey Legislature in the 1970s, hundreds of bikers roared up and down Trenton's State Street, the wind in their hair as they demonstrated for the freedom as American citizens to bash their skulls on the asphalt.

The state's seat belt requirement didn't attract the same noisy crowd when it was enacted in 1984, but the opposition was fundamentally identical — that it was another example of government sticking its nose where it didn't belong.

If a motorist is willing to risk bouncing off the windshield or ejecting his passengers from the vehicle because they found a seat belt uncomfortable, what gives government the right to deny them?

New Jersey prohibits using a hand-held cell phone to call to wish your Aunt Mabel a happy birthday while tooling down the turnpike at 70 miles an hour and likewise bans texting to set up an appointment to meet friends at the mall while drifting across the center line of the roadway.

Like the mandate to wear a face mask, these government directives were designed to protect the lives of those directly involved as well as those innocents who got in their way.

No one's constitutional rights were trampled upon

Constitutional or individual rights were not trampled upon and it is inarguable that the greater good was clearly served. Lives were spared and the severity of injuries was diminished by the mandates.

Over time, of course, all the directives gained acceptance and have become routine acts; the helmet is strapped on before the cycle kick-starts, seat belts click closed before the ignition is switched on and cell phones are plugged into the car's power source rather than the palm of the hand.

Government mandates private behavior in dozens of ways most of which no one thinks twice about. Boarding an airplane, for instance, once a largely simple task, now requires identity verification, X-rays, pat downs, and empty-your-pockets searches.

Most such directives involve matters of public safety and, as such, are endured grudgingly in some instances accompanied by under-the-breath grumblings about

inconvenience and government intrusion.

There is, of course, a crucial and significant difference between helmet, seat belt and cell phone regulations and the requirement to wear a face mask in public: The former will likely never be lifted while the latter at some point will be.

A vaccine will be developed and perfected and Americans will receive a protection which will assure that daily life will slowly return to what it was prior to February.

Face masks will become relics, shoved into the bottom drawer of the dresser and dragged out to show the grandchildren what it was like during the great COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.

Consideration for the well-being of others

It might also be explained to them why some people resisted what was clearly in their best interest and why some reacted so violently when confronted with a request to demonstrate consideration for the well-being of others.

Several large national retailers, for instance, have protected their employees from physical assaults by instructing them to avoid interacting with maskless customers.

In fairness, the overwhelming majority of Americans accept the need for face masks, even those residing in states that encourage it but do not mandate it.

New Jersey is approaching 16,000 deaths and has reported more than 180,000 infections, but the decline in both has been steady for several weeks and face-masking has been a significant contributor to the decline.

Compliance, while at a high level, is still ignored as evidenced in photographs and cell-phone videos of groups of unmasked individuals in often overcrowded spaces.

Younger people believe they will not become infected or, if they do, the discomfort will be minor and fleeting. Little thought is given to their potential to infect others with whom they come in contact and who may be more susceptible, through age or underlying medical conditions, to suffer far more serious consequences.

Resistance to face-masking is certain to continue as will incidents of verbal and physical confrontations — the stuff of YouTube videos.

Normally, the rights of individuals are deserving of respect. In the current climate, however, it might be wise to remember the admonition “Your right to punch me in the nose ends at the point where my nose begins.”

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