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UNH Research Finds Conservative Media Consumers Less Likely to Wear a Mask

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DURHAM, N.H.—While 77% of New Hampshire residents says they always wear a face mask in public—unless they are outside and physically distancing—only half of regular Fox News viewers and a third of conservative talk radio listeners report taking the same precautions, according to new research (https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/conservative-media-consumers-views-COVID-19) released by the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire.

“Developments in the fall and winter months could be a harsh reality test for conflicting beliefs about the value of mask wearing, personal and family health, and whether or not the worst is behind us,” the researchers said. “While most reported taking precautions, sizable minorities—predominantly conservative media consumers—report taking fewer precautions and expressed overall a less serious view of the pandemic. These divergent behaviors and outlooks will influence the course of the pandemic for everyone.”

The researchers also found that a large and growing number of residents disapprove of how President Trump is handling COVID-19. By a 2 to 1 margin, residents say that controlling the spread of COVID-19 should be a higher government priority than restarting the economy. Most conservative media consumers, however, say that restarting the economy should be a higher priority, even if that increases the risk to public health. Despite taking precautions, 56% overall worry that they or a family member might become sick and 59% think the worst of the pandemic is yet to come. Conservative media consumers, on the other hand, tend to be less personally worried and more optimistic about the near future.

This research was conducted by Lawrence Hamilton, professor of sociology and senior Carsey fellow, and Thomas Safford, associate professor of sociology and Carsey faculty fellow.

The Carsey School of Public Policy is nationally recognized for research, policy education and bringing people together for thoughtful dialogue to address important societal challenges. The school develops and facilitates innovative, responsive and equitable solutions at all levels of government and in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.



