

The study reveals the most attractive type of face mask.

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People look more attractive when they are wearing a protective facemask than when going 'bare-faced', a study finds.

The reason may be partly down to the hiding of unattractive features, but also due to the more positive associations facemasks now have.

While facemask use has become divisive for some, people now probably associate them more with being clean than with disease.

For the study, people were asked to rate the attractiveness of 40 male faces with different face coverings.

Here is an example of four of the conditions people were shown separately:



The results showed that the man was rated most attractive when wearing the blue medical face mask — even more so than with no covering at all.

Dr Michael Lewis, study co-author, said:

“Research carried out before the pandemic found medical face masks reduce attractiveness—so we wanted to test whether this had changed since face coverings became ubiquitous and understand whether the type of mask had any effect.

Our study suggests faces are considered most attractive when covered by medical face masks.

This may be because we’re used to healthcare workers wearing blue masks and now we associate these with people in caring or medical professions.

At a time when we feel vulnerable, we may find the wearing of medical masks reassuring and so feel more positive towards the wearer.

We also found faces are considered significantly more attractive when covered by cloth masks than when not covered.

Some of this effect may be a result of being able to hide undesirable features in the lower part of the face—but this effect was present for both less attractive and more attractive people.”

The study was carried out in the UK in February 2021, seven months after face masks became mandatory in many public places.

Dr Lewis said:

“The results run counter to the pre-pandemic research where it was thought masks made people think about disease and the person should be avoided ([Miyazaki et al., 2016](#))

The current research shows the pandemic has changed our psychology in how we perceive the wearers of masks. When we see someone wearing a mask we no longer think ‘that person has a disease, I need to stay away’.

This relates to evolutionary psychology and why we select the partners we do.

Disease and evidence of disease can play a big role in mate selection—previously any cues to disease would be a big turn off.

Now we can observe a shift in our psychology such that face masks are no longer acting as a contamination cue.”

The researchers are now testing if the same results are true for women wearing masks.