

1 **DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.2316>**

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3 **Community-wide mask-wearing: a realistic approach amidst the second**  
4 **wave of Covid-19 in Pakistan**

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10 Madam,

11 With 426,412 confirmed cases to date<sup>1</sup>, Pakistan now stands with most developing  
12 countries in the war against controlling the second wave of Covid-19. According to the  
13 National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC), Pakistan's case positivity rate has  
14 climbed to 9.71% for the first time in five months<sup>2</sup>. This alarming situation calls for a  
15 nationwide lockdown. However, considering the economy of Pakistan, this approach is  
16 not sustainable in the long run. Considering the high mortality rate of the virus and the  
17 uncertainty of a readily available vaccine, we believe that the only solution is the  
18 immediate imposing of mass masking. This approach has previously been proved to  
19 contribute to the control of Covid-19<sup>3</sup>.

20 To inspect public compliance towards mask-wearing, we conducted an observational  
21 study on pedestrians in Karachi, Pakistan. Three socioeconomically diverse areas were  
22 studied from 20th till 27th November 2020. Mask wearing and the area observed were  
23 found significantly associated (p-value: 0.000 - Table 1). The hoarding practice has led  
24 to a consequent spike in masks' prices, making them unaffordable for the people  
25 belonging to low socioeconomic areas. The increasing demand for surgical masks and  
26 respirators has also led to a global shortage of supply and raw materials<sup>4</sup>. Additionally,  
27 a lack of awareness regarding Covid-19 in low socioeconomic areas may also be a

28 reason behind people not wearing a mask. Punjab reported that less than half (48.90%)  
 29 of the general public had information that it is a pandemic disease<sup>5</sup>.

30 Therefore, we urge the government to work with different NGOs and distribute free  
 31 masks to those who cannot afford them. There is also a dire need for effective methods  
 32 for public awareness regarding the role of facemasks in mitigating the virus's  
 33 transmission. This can be achieved through advertisements on social media and mass  
 34 media. The advertisements should be conveyed in the national languages to spread  
 35 valuable information to the masses. Moreover, policymakers need to take immediate  
 36 and strict action against people with non-serious attitudes towards mask-wearing.  
 37 Although the government has made it mandatory to wear face masks in public places  
 38 along with the imposition of a fine for the violation, the real challenge of convincing the  
 39 public to follow these guidelines otherwise remains.

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 41 **Acknowledgement:** None to declare

42 **Disclaimer:** None to declare

43 **Conflict of interest:** None to declare

44 **Funding disclosure:** None to declare

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67 **Table 1: Areas observed correlated with mask-wearing**

Areas observed (least to most socioeconomically stable)	Total (n=1621)	Wearing mask		P-value
		Yes (n=721)	No (n=900)	
Gulshan	537 (33.1%)	133 (24.8%)	404 (75.2%)	0.001 (statistically significant using Chi-Square Test)
PECHS	580 (35.8%)	208 (35.9%)	372 (64.1%)	
Defence	504 (31.1%)	380 (75.4%)	124 (24.6%)	

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