

Polemics in the Lancet volume 398, issue 10301 (August 21, 2021) on the evidence presented in **Physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection to prevent person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19: a systematic review and meta-analysis**. *Lancet*. 2020; **395**: 1973-1987

([View in Article: Scopus \(1168\)](#); [PubMed](#); [Summary](#); [Full Text](#); [Full Text PDF](#); [Google Scholar](#)).

Author: Willem Marten Lijfering

[Revisiting the evidence for physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection](#).

CORRESPONDENCE| VOLUME 398, ISSUE 10301, P659-660, AUGUST 21, 2021.

"Derek Chu and colleagues' 2020 meta-analysis was epidemiologically flawed. In a comparison of countries where face mask wearing was mandatory (eg, China) with countries where it was not (eg, Italy), they find a lower rate of COVID-19 in countries where masks were mandatory. Many variables can explain such a finding, so it is clearly a case of correlation not causation."

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Author: John Conly, Roger Chou, Mitchell J Schwaber, Andreas Voss

[Revisiting the evidence for physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection](#)

CORRESPONDENCE| VOLUME 398, ISSUE 10301, P660, AUGUST 21, 2021

"Derek Chu and colleagues¹ concluded, based on an analysis of a subgroup of observational studies, that health-care workers might afford greater protection against SARS-CoV-2 infection from N95 respirators than from surgical masks. They acknowledge substantial limitations and rated certainty of effect as low. We would argue it is lower still, as several studies seem to have been misclassified with regard to mask type..."

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Author: Luca Scorrano, Ilaria Baglivo, Domenico Maria Cavallo, Francesco Cecconi, Sara Gandini

[Revisiting the evidence for physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection](#)

CORRESPONDENCE| VOLUME 398, ISSUE 10301, P660-661, AUGUST 21, 2021

"Derek Chu and colleagues reported that face mask wearing in hospitals and health-care settings reduces risk of respiratory infection.¹ Surprisingly, this recommendation was extended to the general population. Summary estimates were calculated using results of three severe acute respiratory syndrome studies, of which only two yielded statistically significant results..."

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Author: Qi Zhou, Xiaoqin Wang, Janne Estill, Kehu Yang, Yaolong Chen

[Revisiting the evidence for physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection](#)

CORRESPONDENCE| VOLUME 398, ISSUE 10301, P661, AUGUST 21, 2021

"Derek Chu and colleagues¹ examined whether physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection could prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2. We are concerned that some of the data from the included preprints were out of date, affecting the results of the meta-analysis..."

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Author: Mohamed Abbas, Michihiko Goto, Ermira Tartari, Eli Perencevich, Didier Pittet

[Revisiting the evidence for physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection](#)

CORRESPONDENCE| VOLUME 398, ISSUE 10301, P661-663, AUGUST 21, 2021

"We read with great interest the results of the systematic review¹ on the effect of personal protective equipment (PPE) to prevent SARS-CoV-2 infection, predominantly based on evidence from other betacoronaviruses. As this work raised many more questions than it answered, and because its implications are far-reaching, we highlight several salient concerns..."

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Author: Peter Jüni, Bruno R da Costa, Pavlos Bobos, Nicolas S Bodmer, Allison McGeer

[Revisiting the evidence for physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection](#)

CORRESPONDENCE| VOLUME 398, ISSUE 10301, P663, AUGUST 21, 2021

"The systematic review and meta-analysis by Derek Chu and colleagues¹ has several problems. First, the investigators combine data on SARS-CoV-2, SARS-CoV, and MERS-CoV.... Second, even if combining data from different diseases were valid, the assumed linear association between distance and the log risk ratio of disease in the meta-regression of physical distancing appears inappropriate...Third, only three studies on SARS-CoV-2 contributed to the meta-analysis of masks versus respirators..."

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The response from the authors to the concerns raised by the others above.

Author: Derek Chu, Assem Khamis, Elie Akl, Ignacio Neumann, Karla Solo, Holger Schunemann

[Revisiting the evidence for physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection – Authors' reply](#)

CORRESPONDENCE| VOLUME 398, ISSUE 10301, P663-664, AUGUST 21, 2021

"We appreciate the comments we received on our urgent evidence synthesis addressing use of masks, eye protection, and distancing early on in the COVID-19 pandemic..."

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