

Do Masks Mask Our Emotions? Not Necessarily, Says One Expert

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The United Kingdom is the latest in a long list of countries to [make mask wearing mandatory](#) to slow down the spread of Covid-19, with face coverings compulsory on public transport starting Monday.

Many more of us are opting to wear a mask while shopping, meeting friends and to medical appointments — even if it's not required.

But how does wearing a mask shape how we interact or communicate with others?

A smile is an easy way to defuse social tensions, but is this still possible when a mask is covering the bottom half of our face? And will the emotions of the people we encounter be harder to decode?

CNN spoke to communications expert Ursula Hess, a psychologist and professor at Humboldt University of Berlin.

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It's all in the eyes

Hess said that most people are good at detecting a range of different emotions in the eyes and the upper face, even if they don't realize it.

[A widely used assessment](#) developed in the 1990s to help assess autism by British psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen showed that most people can recognize even subtle mental states like pensiveness just by looking at the changes in expression in eyes.

“The Reading the Mind in the Eyes” test gauges how well you can read the emotions of others. Subjects are asked to look at pictures of different areas around the eyes and to assign them the correct emotional states, said Hess, a professor of developmental psychopathology at University of Cambridge.

You can take the test [here](#).

Hess said that normally our eyes are drawn toward activity, and if the mouth is covered, we'll focus on the upper face.

“You see more than just the eyes; you see the whole region. You see the wrinkles in the forehead, the wrinkles between the eyes, and when the cheeks puff up when you smile, you see that movement,” she explained.

“You should think twice about Botox. If you’re covering your mouth and immobilizing your upper face, you’re not doing your interaction partner any favors.”

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