

It's Gotten Awkward to Wear a Mask

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Last week, just a couple of hours into a house-sitting stint in Massachusetts for my cousin and his wife, I received from them a flummoxed text: “Dude,” it read. “We are the only people in masks.” Upon arriving at the airport, and then boarding their flight, they’d been shocked to find themselves virtually alone in wearing [masks of any kind](#). On another trip they’d taken to Hawaii in July, they told me, long after coverings became optional on planes, some 80 percent of people on their flight had been masking up. This time, though? “We are like the odd man out.”

Being outside of the current norm “does not bother us,” my cousin’s wife said in another text, despite stares from some of the other passengers. But the about-face my cousin and his wife identified does mark a new phase of the pandemic, even if it’s one that has long been playing out in fits and starts. Months after the vanishing of most masking mandates, mask wearing has been relegated to a sharply shrinking sector of society. It has become, once again, a *peculiar* thing to do.

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