

## Peer Review File

Article information: <https://dx.doi.org/10.21037/jphe-23-42>

### Reviewer A

#### Comment 1:

This commentary piece could be very interesting if you:

Analyze more carefully and describe more fully the two meta-analyses that have differing conclusions, and provide your opinion of which one applies more to Japan

#### Reply 1:

Thank you for your suggestion. I have expanded the analysis of the two meta-analyses and clarified why the latter offers more relevant insights for Japan, as reflected in the updated text.

#### Change in the text:

*Page 4 Line 56*

“However, this paper analyzes 76 studies, many of which are observational, making it difficult to distinguish whether the reduction in COVID-19 infections is due to the effect of masks or potentially attributable to other factors such as vaccination, ventilation measures, or seasonal variables (4).”

*Page 4 Line 64*

“This research includes not only COVID-19 but also other respiratory viruses, analyzing a total of 11 randomized controlled trials, thereby reducing the likelihood of bias involvement (5). In this context, the latter is deemed to offer more significant insights that Japan should refer to in verifying the effectiveness of masks.”

#### Comment 2:

Remove the statements about differing opinions being due to a conflict of interest unless you have actual evidence of this. Without meaning to, I think you are accusing colleagues of being unethical, which is something you shouldn't do unless you have proof. Good people can disagree.

#### Reply 2:

I understand your concern. The statements regarding a potential conflict of interest have been removed to avoid any unintended implications.

**Comment 3:** The statement, “Therefore, given the lack of discussion on these negative or skeptical views of masks, experts might have selected compelling studies in their statements to justify their assertions” is not supported with any evidence. How do you know that the downsides of wearing masks is not being discussed? You just cited two studies talking about the downsides. It sounds like they ARE being discussed. Also, you make a strong accusation about mask wearing advocates, suggesting that the scientists are selectively choosing positive studies.

If you are going to say this, you need some evidence to back it up. I suggest you remove this section and simply talk about which meta-analysis is more persuasive and more applicable to Japan instead.

**Reply 3:**

Your points are well taken. I have removed the section in question and instead focused on explaining why the latter meta-analysis is more persuasive and applicable to Japan.

**Change in the text:**

*Page 4 Line 66*

“In this context, the latter is deemed to offer more significant insights that Japan should refer to in verifying the effectiveness of masks.”

*Page 5 Line 77*

“Thus, it is important to understand and carefully interpret the various findings regarding mask policy.”

**Comment 4:**

Discuss the social differences between Japan and the West (specifically the much higher compliance with public health recommendations and voluntary measures), and provide an opinion on whether they matter when making decisions about continued masking in Japan.

**Reply 4:**

I have included a discussion on the social differences between Japan and the West, emphasizing the higher compliance with public health recommendations in Japan. The revised text reflects these considerations in shaping mask policies.

**Changes in the text:**

*Page 5 Line 87*

“Particularly in Japan, where compliance with public health recommendations and voluntary measures is substantially high (12), careful attention must be paid to the potential influence of information disseminated by experts and the media in shaping people's behavior regarding mask policies, which may consequently have an impact on health.”

*Reference*

12. Kim G, Natuplag JM, Jin Lin S, Feng J, Ray N. Balancing Public & Economic Health in Japan during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Descriptive Analysis. *Epidemiologia (Basel)*. 2022;3(2):199-217.

**Comment 5:**

Given that you are just providing an opinion piece, you should strengthen your argument a great deal and provide some kind of conclusion that applies to masking policy if you want it to be a worthwhile read.

**Reply5:**

Your guidance is appreciated. I have worked to strengthen the argument and provided a conclusion that addresses the masking policy in Japan, as seen in the updated text.

**Changes in the text:**

*Page 6 Line 98*

“Although the generalization of mask policies is constrained by the need to consider factors such as cultural differences in mask-wearing and the implementation of other health measures across different regions, in Japan, as well, the wearing of masks should be a matter entrusted to individual discretion. Consequently, what is required of the government, experts, and media is not the imposition of their own values but rather the dissemination of accurate information and the provision of resources for informed decision-making; establishing a system of high transparency to achieve this is an urgent matter.”

**Comment 6:**

The English writing has some problems. I have gone through and made corrections, but it would be good to have it reviewed by an English language writing editor.

**Reply6:**

Thank you for your guidance. I have had the manuscript reviewed by an English language writing editor to ensure clarity and precision.

## **Reviewer B**

### **Comment 1:**

Major revisions recommended. Requires rewriting for clarity and English language. Each statement should be supported with a reference, for example the dates of mask policy changes in Japan.

### **Reply 1:**

Thank you for your valuable feedback. In accordance with your suggestion, I have included references to illustrate the dates of mask policy changes in Japan within the manuscript. Furthermore, I have made revisions to the English to ensure consistency throughout the text. I hope these changes will render the manuscript more accessible to readers.

### **Change in the text:**

*Reference*

“1. Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. Coronavirus (COVID-19). Accessed March 2, 2023. [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000164708\\_00079.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000164708_00079.html)

### **Comment 2:**

This manuscript does not present new ideas or information but reads as an opinion piece. Perhaps a review of the relevant literature to support your point of view, and some qualitative data may increase the impact of this manuscript. Or could submit as a letter to the editor.

### **Reply 2:**

Thank you for your insights. I would like to clarify that this manuscript was originally intended as a letter to the editor, which may explain its opinion-oriented tone.

### **Change in the text:**

*Page 2 Line 28*

“Article Type

Letter to the Editor”

## **Reviewer C**

### **Comment 1:**

The work is very interesting and well done in my opinion. This Article impactful and fit well with in the scope of this journal. I recommend changes to be made in the text:

- I suggest you to modify it and add the type of article.

### **Reply 1:**

Thank you for your insights. I would like to clarify that this manuscript was originally intended as a letter to the editor, which may explain its opinion-oriented tone.

### **Change in the text:**

*Page 2 Line 28*

“Article Type

Letter to the Editor”

### **Comment 2:**

- I suggest you add a table with the list of abbreviations used in the text

### **Reply 2:**

Thank you for your suggestion. A table with the list of abbreviations used in the text has been added for clarity.

### **Change in the text:**

*Page2 Line 31*

“Abbreviations:

COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019

HPV: Human Papillomavirus”

### **Comment 3:**

-I suggest to add a Section to add all the limitation of the study

### **Reply 3:**

Thank you for the suggestion. The change has been made in the text as follows.

### **Change in the text:**

*Page 6 Line 98*

“Although the generalization of mask policies is constrained by the need to consider factors such as cultural differences in mask-wearing and the implementation of other health measures across different regions, in Japan, as well, the wearing of masks should be a matter entrusted to individual discretion.”

### **Comment 4:**

- I suggest you go deeper into the covid period and talk about psychological stress. I suggest some bibliography [10.3390/brainsci13030481]

### **Reply 4:**

I appreciate your guidance. I have expanded the discussion on the COVID-19 period, specifically focusing on psychological stress from wearing masks, and included additional

bibliography.

**Change in the text:**

*Page 5 Line 72*

“Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the wearing of masks may hinder efficient communication and exacerbate social dysfunction and depression (8).”

*Reference*

8. Campagne DM. The problem with communication stress from face masks. *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports*. 2021;3:100069.

**Comment 5:**

- Please review English, punctuation errors are present.

**Reply 5:**

Thank you for your guidance. I have had the manuscript reviewed by an English language writing editor to ensure clarity and precision.

**Comment 6:**

Congratulations on the work.

**Reply 6:**

Thank you for your kind words and support.