

Narratives on face mask wearing from members of Navigating Knowledge Landscapes Network - the contribution No. 10

Country: **HUNGARY**

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In Hungary, COVID emergency was declared on 11 March, and then a curfew was imposed on 27 March. According to this, everyone can leave their home only for work, shopping or caring for the elderly/sick. It was released in the countryside on 4 May, and is only valid in Budapest and Pest County.

In the initial stage of pandemic, even the official information about wearing the mask was controversial, because the chief medical officer also said at a daily press conference that those who are not sick should not wear the simple mask as it does not protect against anything. Then it changed in a few days and everyone was officially offered to wear a mask to prevent the spread of the infection by saying that even the simplest mask is better than nothing.

There was no national provision for wearing a mask for a long time. It became only from 4 May mandatory to wear the mask throughout the country while shopping and using public transport. In open air, a safety distance of 1,5 meters is mandatory instead of mask. The mayors of the settlements could decide to wear the mask earlier in their own competence (eg in Budapest it was obligatory to wear the mask on public transport vehicles and when shopping from 27 April). The mask was in short supply when emergency was announced, but it is now available in many places and can be obtained at the checkout of almost every grocery store if someone started shopping without it.

I wear it during my shopping and I do not consider any measures in this regard to be excessive. There is no mandatory rule for wearing a mask in the open air, there is a protective distance of 1.5 meters, which I also consider justified. However, there is no regulation on the duration of grouping, although research shows that a person's proximity beyond 15 minutes is really dangerous.

In my experience, more than half of people even used the mask during their shopping when it was not mandatory yet. Now in stores almost everyone uses it without exception.

Surprisingly, the few exceptions all came from the most at risk age group of over 65 years. However, since the rules of curfew were relieved (4 May), young people have not worn and observed the 1,5 meter safety distance in restaurants and outdoor conversations.

I think the biggest concern is that the mask has been in short supply for a long time, and that its trade has not been subject to official pricing, so prices have been uncontrolled. When masks were not available, the government did not resolve to distribute simpler masks at the entrance to larger grocery stores than, e.g. it was done in Austria.