

18. SWACSM Abstract

Systematic Observation of Mask Adherence and Physical Distancing in a Public Recreational Setting in Response to Public Policy

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ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, regular physical activity (PA) remained an important recommendation to prevent hypokinetic diseases. At the same time, changes in policies on mask wearing and physical distancing may have increased confusion about engaging in PA. Public outdoor recreation spaces are potentially valuable resources to address these challenges, however there is limited knowledge of mask and distancing behaviors in outdoor recreational areas. **PURPOSE:** The aim of this study was to observe mask and distancing behaviors of individuals performing PA at a public outdoor recreational setting. **METHODS:** We used a modified version of the Systematic Observation of Mask Adherence and Distancing (SOMAD) tool to record mask wearing and physical distancing behavior of individuals at a public outdoor recreational area. Data collection took place twice per week for 13 weeks between March 2021 to June 2021 at a public park located in a Southern California (CA) desert city. The CDC announced mask and distancing guidelines on April 27 and May 13. California announced statewide guidelines on May 3. **RESULTS:** Out of the total observations (n=711 individuals), 11.4% wore a mask properly and 29.5% maintained a physical distance of ≥ 6 ft from other individuals. In regard to CDC policy announcements, proper mask wearing decreased from 13.4% (initial policy) to 6.3% (4/27/21 policy) to 4.2% (5/13/21 policy). During the same time periods, proper 6-ft physical distancing slightly decreased from 28.9% (initial policy) to 27.1% (4/27/21 policy) then increased to 33.6% (5/13/21 policy). Following the CA guideline change, mask wearing decreased from 13.1% (initial policy) to 4.3% (5/03/21). Physical distancing in the same policy periods increased from 29.1% to 31.4%. **CONCLUSION:** Mask wearing and physical distancing remained low at the public outdoor recreational park. These findings warrant further examination to discern those who wore masks in groups from those who did not wear masks while exercising alone. Furthermore, continued systematic observations of mask wearing, distancing, and physical activity behaviors analyzed alongside data related to COVID-19 cases would provide insight to public health researchers when creating infection prevention guidelines whilst promoting physical activity to enhance immunity.