



British finally buy-in to wearing masks, as Joe Biden implores Americans to follow suit

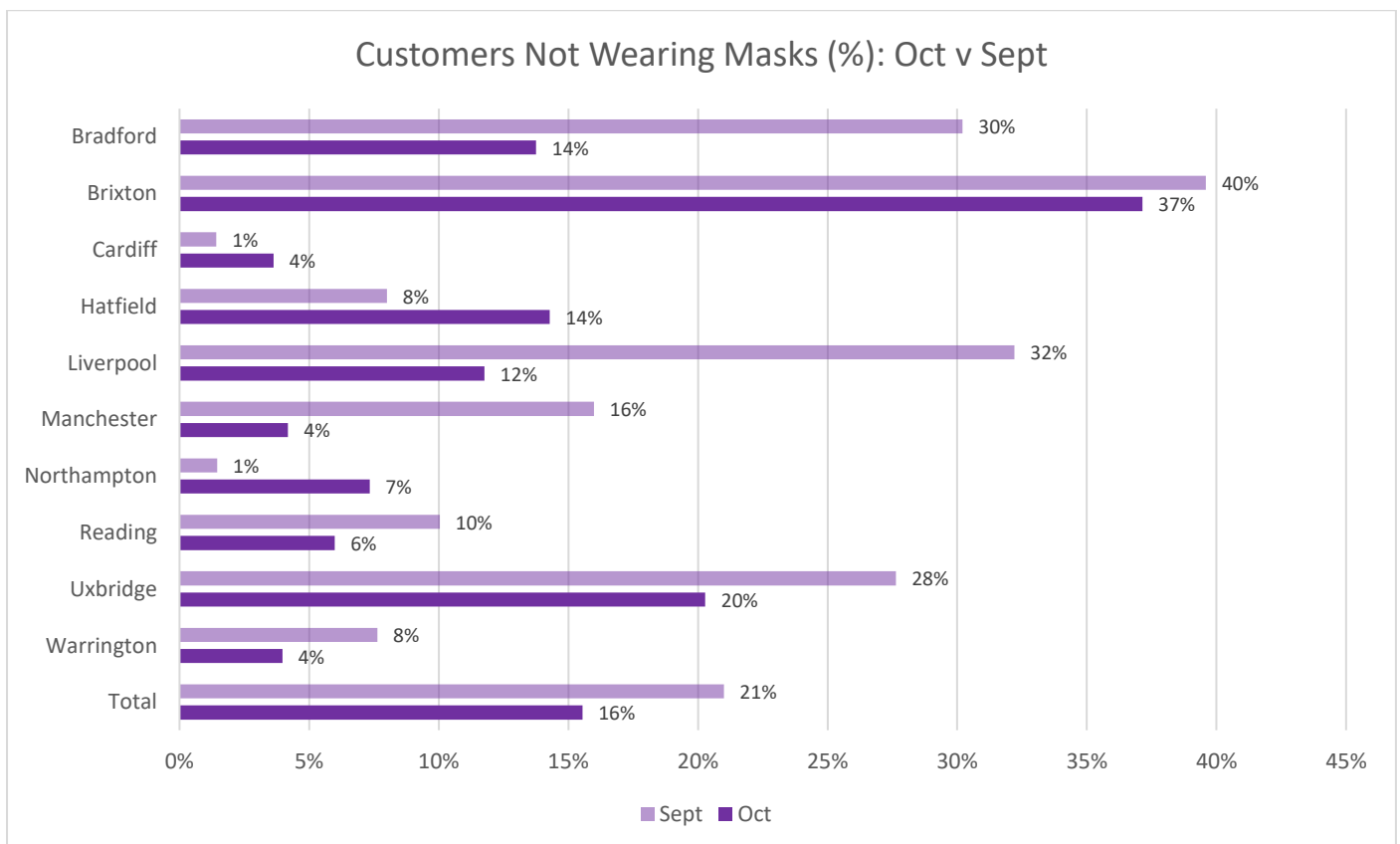
Leading Mystery Shopping organisation, Storecheckers, has been tracking the wearing of masks in Britain's High Streets. Its latest research shows a welcome rise in the wearing of face coverings by both shoppers and store staff, testament that the population has finally seen the importance that masks can have in halting the spread of COVID-19.

Storecheckers sent Mystery Shoppers to look again at the centres visited in September and assess how the wearing of masks affected their perception of COVID safety in the retail environment and their willingness to return.

The fieldwork took place as northern towns and cities were placed under Tier 3 restrictions and ended in the week before the Prime Minister told the nation that England would be entering into a second lockdown.

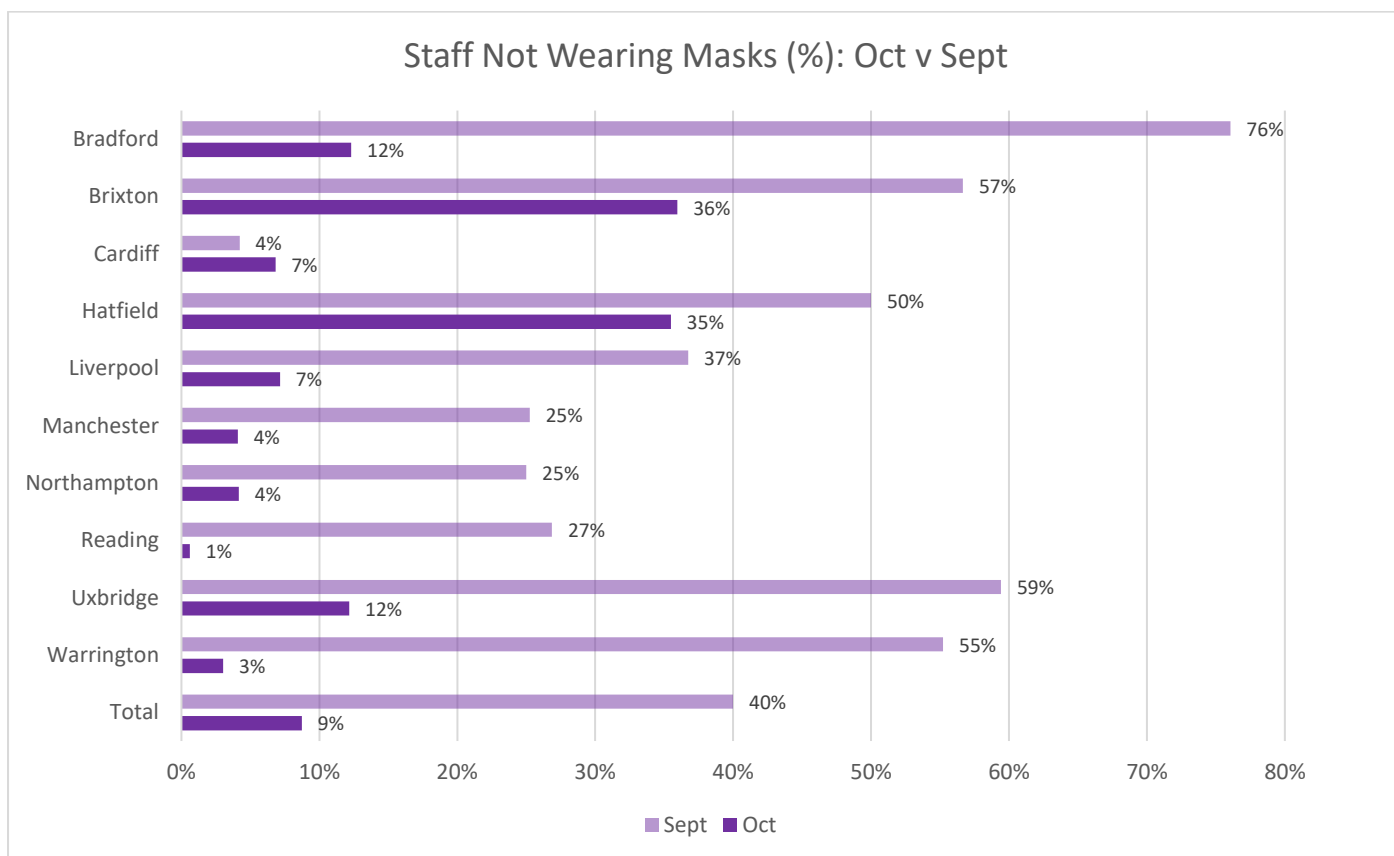
The results show that the public was impacted by these factors, with 84% of shoppers wearing masks, 5% more than in September, whilst shop staffs' mask usage rose from 60% to 91%.

Jeff Caplan, Storecheckers' Managing Director, commented: 'Stores were slow to insist all staff wore masks, which impacted confidence within the High Street. Following the government's clearer direction on this, the rise in mask wearing amongst store staff has led to an upturn in customer confidence. This correlation is clear in our research'.



Cardiff, Manchester and Warrington had just 4% of shoppers without masks. Manchester, along with Bradford and Liverpool, were COVID hotspots that saw double digit falls in the percentage of shoppers not wearing masks.

Looking at staff not wearing masks, of the centres visited in September, four had shop staff unmasked rates of over 40%. Our October research showed a marked improvement, with no cases over 36%, and with only two locations over 12% - Brixton at 36% and Hatfield at 35%. The strongest adherence to mask wearing by staff was evidenced in Reading, with 99% wearing masks, and Warrington at 97% compliance. Bradford (12% v 76%) and Uxbridge (12% v 59%) showed significant falls in 'no mask' ratings.



Customers are far more likely to return to shops where all staff are wearing masks - 93% of visitors to outlets with all staff masked were 'Fully Confident' or 'Quite Confident' in returning, against 64% where not all staff had face coverings.

There was also a wide gap on perception of care. In shops where all staff wore masks 86% felt 'Very safe' or 'Safe' with COVID security, this dropped to 56% where not all staff had face coverings on.

Jeff Caplan added: 'Our High Streets are on a knife edge. Customer confidence is essential to encourage people back into shops, so shops need to be vigilant in their COVID procedures to protect their customers, their staff, and their future. Customer experience and customer service must now include customer safety'.

Proportion of staff and customers not wearing masks

Centre	Customer		Staff	
	Oct	Sept	Oct	Sept
Bradford	14%	30%	12%	76%
Brixton	37%	40%	36%	57%
Cardiff	4%	1%	7%	4%
Hatfield	14%	8%	35%	50%
Liverpool	12%	32%	7%	37%
Manchester	4%	16%	4%	25%
Northampton	7%	1%	4%	25%
Reading	6%	10%	1%	27%
Uxbridge	20%	28%	12%	59%
Warrington	4%	8%	3%	55%
Total	16%	21%	9%	40%

Storecheckers is a Manchester based Mystery Shopping and Market Research organisation that has, since 1989, been helping businesses in the UK and across the world deliver brilliant experiences to their customers. As the UK leaders in visitor feedback to Councils and Business Improvement Districts, we work with Placemakers in 40+ centres including Cambridge, Liverpool and Manchester and our facilities extend to include Best Bar None reviews, Night Time Economy research and COVID audits.

The above survey was completed in the week ended 24th October 2020, across retail centres within England and Wales, involving C. 2,500 customers and 1,000 staff in 195 stores across sectors ranging from healthcare and convenience to fashion and finance.

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