



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 9, 2020

## Kansas Health Secretary Used Doctored Data to Justify Mask Mandates

Kansas Health Secretary Dr. Lee Norman has been caught using doctored data to justify ongoing mask mandates.

At a press conference Wednesday, Norman presented a chart depicting the seven-day average of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people in Kansas counties. An orange line showed the cases in counties that had adopted Governor Laura Kelly's (D) July 3 mask mandate, while a blue line showed the cases in counties that had not.



According to the [Wyandotte Daily](#):

Although it wasn't planned to be a scientific experiment or a trial, results from non-mask counties (the control group) were compared to results from counties with mandatory mask orders (the experimental counties). The results showed that masks work, Dr. Norman said.

There are 15 counties with mask mandates, including Wyandotte County, and about 90 Kansas counties without them, he said. The 15 counties account for two-thirds of the population in the state, and are mostly urban areas where people may come into contact with others more frequently.

Dr. Norman's chart showed a significant decline in COVID-19 rates in counties with mask orders, he said, while counties without mask mandates had a flat rate.

Furthermore, because of the way the chart was designed, it actually appeared that the counties with no mask mandates had more cases than the ones with mandates. This was clearly the impression that reporters got and that Norman suggested was accurate, reported the [Sentinel](#), a publication of the conservative Kansas Policy Institute (KPI).

One reporter asked Norman a question, which Norman restated thus: "If the no-mask counties would start masking, would it [blue line] drop, and would it dip down below the mask counties?"

Norman's answer: "I think it would."

"But," charged the *Sentinel*, "the chart was consciously manipulated to produce that appearance by comparing the same data (cases per day) on different axes."

"Cases for mandate counties are based on the left axis, with a range of 15 to 25, while those without mandates are based on a secondary axis on the right, with a scale of 4 to 14."

The *Sentinel* replotted the data using the same vertical axis, yielding "results [that] look dramatically different." Specifically, the blue line (non-masking counties) is consistently below the orange line (masking counties). In other words, the no-mask counties already have fewer cases than the mask counties, even after more than a month of masking.

Moreover, while Norman claimed, "All of the improvement in the case development comes from those counties wearing masks," that's not entirely true, either. While the blue line didn't fall much, it did dip



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slightly from its starting point, so even non-mask counties saw some improvement.

According to the *Sentinel*, KPI economist Michael Austin had some harsh words for Norman:

“At a time when the public needs government to provide sound conclusions with accurate information, it’s unfortunate the Kansas Health Secretary knowingly deceived the public into justifying his narrative.”

Austin went on to say that a valid “experiment,” as Dr. Norman described it, would have only one variable — whether or not a mask mandate was in place. But in this case, every county in his control groups are [*sic*] wildly different. In both groups, there are rural counties with low population density, urban counties with high density, counties with many cases and no cases, and counties with and without outbreaks in nursing homes and other isolated clusters, just to name a few.

In other words, one can draw no conclusions about mask mandates from the chart Norman presented. But one can draw some definite conclusions about the Sunflower State’s executive branch, as Kansas House Majority Leader Dan Hawkins (R) did in remarks to the *Sentinel*.

“Governor Kelly and her administration have failed Kansans time and again, but manipulating data to intentionally deceive the entire state is a new low,” said Hawkins. “Tens-of-thousands of Kansans have lost their jobs and businesses as a direct result of Governor Kelly’s politics-first response to the COVID pandemic, and these individuals struggling to make ends meet deserve to know the truth. It is reprehensible for a public servant like Dr. Norman that we trusted to protect our health and safety in a nonpartisan way to intentionally spread misinformation. The Kelly administration has lost all credibility.”

*Image: Rattankun Thongbun/iStock/Getty Images Plus*

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