

## **WEARING MASKS AT SCHOOL DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC TIP SHEET FOR PEDIATRIC CLINICIANS**

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### **STUDENTS SHOULD GO BACK TO SCHOOL SAFELY**

- Schools provide more than just academics to children and adolescents. In addition to reading, writing and math, children learn social and emotional skills, get exercise and access to mental health support and other things that cannot be provided with online learning. For many families, school is where kids get healthy meals, access to the internet, and other vital services.
- Evidence so far suggests that children and adolescents are less likely to have symptoms or severe disease from infection (AAP statement 7/10/2020). As a result, infected children may not have symptoms and, if not masked, may spread the infection to those around them.

### **WEARING MASKS**

- Wearing masks is a key component of the strategy to decrease Covid-19 transmission. To be effective, all children need to wear masks.
- Having children in school who are not masked is a risk for teachers, other adults in the school and other children.
- Non-masked children can also increase community spread of COVID-19 potentially to the home setting to parents and grandparents.
- Counsel parents
  - Explain the need for mask wearing in developmentally-appropriate terms to their child
  - Let the child participate in choosing a mask
  - Parents can help their children to adjust to mask wear by modeling appropriate mask wear behavior themselves

### **EXEMPTIONS**

- **Medical exemptions from wearing a mask are rare and should be carefully considered**
  - Children with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities
    - Many children with developmental disabilities have other medical conditions that place them at higher risk for complications from coronavirus infections. Masking is protective for them.

- Rather than focusing on exemptions, help parents look at mask wearing as a life skill that can be taught, same as getting dressed, brushing teeth.
- When applicable, instruct parents to have the child’s behavior team institute a program to teach and reward mask wearing behavior just like they teach any other desired behavior.
- Children with asthma or other pulmonary conditions
  - From Brian McGinley, MD Pediatric pulmonologist – “There is no evidence that a surgical or cloth mask impairs O2 intake or leads to CO2 retention.” Remind parents that surgeons and operating room personnel wear these masks for hours a day on a routine basis.
- **If a clinician determines that a child has a condition that warrants an exemption, a question that needs to be addressed is “Should the child be excluded from wearing a mask at school or would it be better to exclude them from in-person school to limit the exposure risk?”**

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What if my child is scared of wearing a face covering?** Adapted from [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)

It's understandable that children may be afraid of cloth face coverings at first. Here are a few ideas to help make them seem less scary:

- Look in the mirror with the face coverings on and talk about it.
- Put a cloth face covering on a favorite stuffed animal.
- Decorate them so they're more personalized and fun.
- Show your child pictures of other children wearing them.
- Draw one on their favorite book character.
- Practice wearing the face covering at home to help your child get used to it.