

CHILDREN, MASKS, AND COVID-19: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

COVID-19 Among Children:

How common is COVID-19 among children?^{1,2}

- As of 9/10/2020, there have been almost 550,000 children who have tested positive for COVID-19, representing 10% of all cases in the United States.
- Between 7/9/2020-8/6/2020, there was a 90% increase in childhood COVID-19 cases in the United States and another 15% increase between 7/27/2020-9/10/2020.
- Still, only a small percentage of children are tested for COVID-19 in the United States with about 4-15% of all tests conducted in children (depending on the state).
- Among the children who are tested, about 3.3-16.6% of those children test positive for COVID-19.

How is COVID-19 affecting children's health?^{1,3-5}

- Children tend to have less severe COVID-19 compared to the general population and only rarely need to be hospitalized or die from the virus. Ongoing research is being conducted looking at the long-term effects of this virus on children's health.
 - Hospitalizations: Among children with COVID-19, only about 0.3-8.2% require hospitalization.
 - Mortality: Children comprise only 0.0-0.3% of all reported COVID-19 deaths in the United States.
- There are some children with certain underlying medical conditions who may be at an increased risk of developing more severe COVID-19. Families with medically-vulnerable children should work closely with their medical providers and school leaders to help ensure their safety.
- Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) is a rare post-infectious complication of COVID-19 only seen in children. As of 9/17/2020, there have been 935 confirmed cases and 19 deaths from MIS-C in the United States. Many children who develop MIS-C were previously healthy, and many families do not know their children were ever infected or exposed with COVID-19 because symptoms can be mild or absent. Symptoms of MIS-C typically develop 2-4 weeks later and can include fever, rash, red eyes, vomiting, and/or diarrhea that range from mild to life-threatening.

Masking as a Means of Controlling Community and School Spread of COVID-19:

How is COVID-19 transmitted?⁶⁻¹⁴

- SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is primarily spread by the transfer of virus-containing respiratory droplets from one person to another. People who are infected with COVID-19 expel respiratory droplets even when breathing and talking, but they expel more (and therefore, more viral particles) with a greater force and distance when coughing, sneezing, shouting, and singing. These virus-containing respiratory droplets are then inhaled by another person who can become infected with COVID-19.
- People with COVID-19 are infectious even if they have mild symptoms or do not have any symptoms at all. In other words, someone can transmit COVID-19 to other people even if they do not know they are infected. Transmission is more likely when physical distancing of at least 6 feet is not maintained and can occur just by talking to someone who is standing nearby.

Do masks help prevent spread of COVID-19? Yes!¹⁵⁻²²

- There is mounting evidence that facemasks decrease the risk of COVID-19 transmission, and the use of facemasks as an effective means of ending the pandemic is endorsed by the leading infectious disease organizations.

- *International Research:* A large evaluation of studies from 16 different countries found that when masks were part of the strategy to reduce COVID-19 spread, there was about a 15% lower chance of COVID-19 transmission (compared to when masks were not utilized).
- *Local Evidence:* South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) investigated how local mask ordinances affected the number of COVID-19 cases in South Carolina. The areas that mandated mask wearing in public had a 15% *decrease* in new COVID cases in the 4 weeks after the mandate was implemented. Areas that did not mandate masks experienced an overall *increase* in total cases of 30.4% over the same time period.

What role do masks play in the prevention of COVID-19 spread?²⁰⁻²⁵

- There is growing evidence that, when worn correctly over the nose and mouth, facemasks filter the virus-containing respiratory droplets expelled by someone who is infected with COVID-19 when they breathe, talk, yell, sneeze, cough, and/or sing, the primary mode of COVID-19 transmission.
- Even single layer cloth masks filter some respiratory droplets, although cloth masks made of 2-3 layers are better. In fact, 2-layer cloth masks can block nearly as much as a surgical mask without compromising breathability
- Additionally, wearing masks may help remind some people to avoid touching their mouths and faces.

Are there health risks with the use of masks?²⁶⁻²⁸

- There is NO evidence that wearing a cloth facemask (even for a prolonged period of time):
 - makes it harder for a child to breathe, focus in school, or function normally,
 - affects a child's normal lung development,
 - weakens a child's immune system,
 - causes a build-up of carbon dioxide or leads to carbon dioxide poisoning,
 - causes low oxygen levels, or
 - causes any mental or emotional harm to a child.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strongly endorses universal mask wearing in anyone 2 years and older and is considered a critical component of a "safe return of children to school, child care, and other group settings....Cloth face coverings can be safely worn by all children 2 years of age and older, including the vast majority of children with underlying health conditions, with rare exception."

Mask use during physical activity^{26,29-32}

- Due to increased force of breathing and increased respiratory rates, there is a theoretically higher risk of COVID-19 transmission during physical exertion.
- Masks can increase the perception of shortness of breath, but there is no evidence that masks change athletic performance.
- Many physical activities can be safely performed while wearing a mask. However, until it can be studied further, it is prudent to avoid wearing a mask for long periods of time while performing highly strenuous cardiopulmonary exercise.
- Avoid wearing a mask when participating in water sports or when there is a risk of entanglement on nearby equipment that could cause injury or accidentally cover eyes.
- Some people may need to reduce their exertion level or take more frequent rest periods when exercising while wearing a mask. If someone feels light-headed or dizzy when wearing a mask during exercise, they should rest until symptoms are gone.
- Sweat can make a mask wet. Wet masks should always be exchanged for dry ones as a wet mask may not function as efficiently and can make it difficult to breathe.
- Outdoor physical education, recess, and sports with physical distancing of at least 6 feet between individuals are all great times to have intentional facemask breaks.
- Athletes should always wear facemasks when on the sidelines, participating in team chats, and when traveling between locations (e.g., to and from the field, court, gym, pool, etc.)

- Coaches, officials, volunteers, and spectators should all wear facemasks and maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet whenever possible.
- Any person with a fever should avoid exercise, as it may increase the risk of cardiorespiratory complications.

Mask Use and Performing Arts³³⁻³⁵

- Singing generates large amounts of respiratory droplets and aerosols which contribute significantly to the transmission of COVID-19. In fact, singers have been linked to a number of super spreader events since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Evidence also shows that aerosols are generated by wind instruments.
- Masks should be worn by all performers, including singers and individuals playing wind instruments, at all times.
- Bell coverings are recommended for wind instruments.

Are there tips for helping children wear facemasks?

- Children are incredibly adaptable and resilient, and most children with age-appropriate instruction (and some patience) will not only readily accept wearing a mask but can be taught to wear one properly even for prolonged periods of time.
- Proper mask size and fit are critically important. There are some excellent online resources that offer advice on selecting the best mask and other helpful tips related to masks and children. A few are listed here:
 - [Chalkacademy.com: Review and comparison of cloth masks for kids with tips for proper use academy](#)
 - [Healthychildren.org](#)
 - [Tips & Tricks: Helping Kids with Mask Wearing](#)
 - [CDC](#)

Is there anyone who shouldn't wear a mask?^{28,36,37}

- There are a few reasons why it may be unsafe for someone to wear a cloth facemask, including:
 - Some people with certain respiratory conditions like severe asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD),
 - anyone who cannot remove a mask by themselves (e.g., someone with a physical or developmental disability and children <2 years of age, and
 - someone with a significant facial injury or burn.
- A medical exemption to wearing a mask in school or during school-related activities is rare and must come from a medical professional with appropriate training and credentials (e.g., MD or DO). "Exemption cards" from the ADA are fraudulent and do not actually exist.
- Families of students with mask exemptions should work closely with their medical providers and school leaders to help ensure their safety and others around them.

Is there a proper way to handle and care for facemasks?³⁸

- It is important to always put on and remove masks correctly, including using hand sanitizer or washing hands before and after handling or touching the mask.
- Cloth facemasks should be washed after each use.
- They can be washed in the washing machine with the rest of the laundry. Use regular laundry detergent and the warmest appropriate water setting for the cloth used to make the mask.
- Cloth facemasks can also be cleaned by hand by soaking in a bleach solution for 5 minutes and then rinsing thoroughly with cool or room temperature water.
 - Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:
 - 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) household bleach per gallon of room temperature water, or
 - 4 teaspoons household bleach per quart of room temperature water
 - Check the label to verify that the bleach is intended for disinfection. Some bleach products, such as those designed for safe use on colored clothing, may not be suitable for disinfection. Ensure the bleach product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.

- To dry cloth facemasks in the dryer, use the highest heat setting and leave in the dryer until completely dry. If air drying, lay flat and allow to completely dry. If possible, place the mask in direct sunlight.

Is there anything else to consider with masks and COVID-19?³⁹

- While masks greatly reduce the spread of COVID-19, they are not perfect. Therefore, in most cases:
 - a “close contact” is anyone who spends more than 15 minutes within 6 feet of someone infected with COVID-19 REGARDLESS of masks. In most cases, close contacts are required to quarantine at home for 14 days;
 - anyone with signs or symptoms of COVID-19 (or with a confirmed infection or exposure) should not attend or participate in school or after school activities, regardless of mask usage.

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