

Coronavirus/COVID-19

Face Masks in Schools

The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** and the **American Academy of Pediatrics** strongly recommend that universal masking take place in school. Masking is critical in keeping schools open for in-person learning.



Why issue an order now to mask school children?

- **The full impacts of the Omicron variant are unknown but still very concerning.**
- We know that Omicron is likely more transmissible (100x) than the original strain or of Delta.
- A person infected with Omicron is likely to spread it to 8-15 other people.
- Vaccinated individuals who become infected can spread Omicron to other people.



Can transmission in schools impact community transmission?

- **Kids spread COVID-19 as efficiently as adults. Several outbreak investigations have shown students infecting older household members.**
- Since August 2021, one K-12 student and nearly a dozen parents with children in K-12 schools have died in St. Clair County.
- Living with a child engaged in in-person learning without public health mitigation measures increases the odds of COVID-19 for the household (Lessier et al., 2021).
 - One study estimated that the risk of infection of household members from a positive child was 52%, an extremely high rate (Darwood et al., 2022).



Do masks in schools actually reduce virus transmission?

- **Study after study show the effectiveness of masking in K-12 schools.**
- St. Clair County reduced cases among K-12 students from November 2021 to December 2021 after mask mandates were instituted by Port Huron Area Schools (Nov. 28th) and Algonac Schools (Dec. 2nd). Cases in the K-12 age group declined from 659 cases in November to 446 cases in December, a **32% decline**. In the same period, cases in all other age groups **increased 33%**. If cases in the K-12 age group increased at the same rate as other age groups, there would have been 876 cases in December or 430 more cases than we actually had in December.
- In Arizona, scientists assessed the impact of mask policies in school related outbreaks at 1,020 (98%) of K-12 public schools from July 15-August 31, 2021. Schools *without* mask requirements were **3.5 times** more likely to have outbreaks compared to schools with mask requirements (Jehn, et al., 2021).

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Do masks in schools actually reduce virus transmission?

- In 520 counties across the United States, counties without school mask requirements experienced larger increases in pediatric COVID-19 case rates after the start of 2021 school year compared with counties that had school mask requirements (Budzyn, et al., 2021).
- During the Fall 2020 school year, we saw a layered approach also worked in school in Missouri (Dawson et al., 2021), Utah (Hershow et al., 2021), rural Wisconsin (Falk et al., 2021) and Florida (Doyle et al., 2021).



Why mask if most children will recover from the virus anyway?

- **It's true that a majority of children infected, will recover.**
- However, some will become severely ill and may need to be hospitalized, treated in the intensive care unit, or placed on a ventilator to breathe.
- Some children may experience long-term physical effects after recovering called "long haul" COVID.
- Uncontrolled spread could lead to frequent disruptions in in-person learning and cause hardship for students, parents and school staff.



What type of masks are recommended?

- **A systematic review that pooled more than 70 studies showed mask use reduced transmission by 53% (Talic, et al., 2021) .**
- A well fitting mask that has at least 2 layers of fabric and covers the nose and mouth is key (CDC, 2022).
- N95 masks are also highly effective as they can block at least 95% of particles in the air (CDC, 2020).



Why is universal masking so important in a school setting?

- **While masks provide protection to the wearer, they primarily serve as source control and the greatest benefits occur if everyone wears them.**
- Kids are highly influenced by peers and teachers. If all peers are required to wear masks, it becomes the group norm.