

Face Masks

American Academy of Pediatrics Interim Clinical Guidance

August 11, 2021

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strongly endorses the use of safe and effective infection control procedures to protect children and adolescents. During the COVID-19 pandemic, effective infection prevention and control requires the correct and consistent use of a well-fitting face mask (click [here](#) for information on types of masks). Face masks should fit over the mouth and nose and fit snugly along the side of the face without any gaps (click [here](#) to learn how to improve the fit).

On July 27, 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued [new guidance](#) that vaccinated people should wear a mask indoors in public if they are in an area with [substantial or high transmission](#), AND that [universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools](#), regardless of vaccination status, should be implemented for the 2021-22 school year. On July 18, 2021, the AAP already had issued a [universal school masking recommendation](#). Face masks 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. Children 2 years of age and older have demonstrated their ability to wear a face mask. In addition to protecting the child, the use of face masks significantly reduces the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and other respiratory infections within schools and other community settings. Home use of face masks also may be particularly valuable in households that include medically fragile, immunocompromised, or at-risk adults and children.

Consistent use of a face mask is one part of a comprehensive strategy (in addition to vaccination, physical distancing, and hand washing) to mitigate risk and help reduce the spread of COVID-19, particularly in those who are not fully vaccinated or not eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

Pediatricians are encouraged to discuss infection control practices with their patients and families.

- When you wear a face mask, you protect others as well as yourself, especially if you are not vaccinated and/or are around others who are not vaccinated.
- All students older than 2 years and all school staff should wear face masks at [school](#) and [child care settings](#) (unless medical or developmental conditions prohibit use).
- Per CDC [guidance](#), face masks are recommended while indoors in public for **fully vaccinated** persons in an area with substantial or high transmission. Face masks are no longer needed for persons who are fully vaccinated and in an area with low to moderate levels of SARS-CoV-2 transmission unless it is required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local businesses, and workplace (eg. health care settings) guidance. Fully vaccinated individuals may choose to wear a face mask regardless of community transmission levels.
- For those who are [unvaccinated](#), face masks should be worn, with an emphasis on indoor masking. In areas with [high numbers of COVID-19 cases](#), consider wearing a mask in crowded outdoor settings and for activities with close contact with others.

Public health mask mandates may vary based on the level of SARS-CoV-2 circulating in each community, and it is recommended that local guidance be followed.

- In both indoor and outdoor settings, unvaccinated individuals should continue to **physically distance** around people who do not live in their household.
- Face mask use should be continued for those who are unvaccinated and playing **indoor sports** (except for sports in which the mask may become a hazard) and **outdoors sports that have close contact** (see AAP interim guidance on [Return to Sports and Physical Activity](#)).
- Face masks should be worn **any time you are traveling** on a plane, bus, train, or other form of public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States and in US transportation hubs such as airports and bus stations. This includes transportation via [school bus](#) (see [AAP Interim Guidance](#)).
- People who are **immunocompromised** or people who live in a household with an individual who is immunocompromised, at increased risk for severe disease, or are unvaccinated (children < 12 years of age) might choose to wear a face mask regardless of the level of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in their community.
- Wear a face mask inside your home if someone you live with is sick with **symptoms** of COVID-19 or has tested positive for COVID-19.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use **hand sanitizer** with at least 60% alcohol after touching or removing your face mask.

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Your Guide to Masks. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Scientific Brief: Community Use of Cloth Masks to Control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>
- [Gettings J, Czarnik M, Morris E, et al. Mask use and ventilation improvements to reduce COVID-19 incidence in elementary schools — Georgia, November 16–December 11, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2021;70\(21\):779–784. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7021e1>](#)
- Howard J, Huang A, Li Z, et al. An evidence review of face masks against COVID-19. *Proc Natl Acad Sci.* 2021;118(4):e2014564118. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2014564118>

Information for Families from HealthyChildren.org

- [Masks or Cloth Face Coverings for Children During COVID-19](#)
- [Mask Mythbusters: 5 Common Misconceptions about Kids & Cloth Face Coverings](#)
- [In Person School During COVID-19](#).