

# Face Masks for Children During COVID-19

Masks remain a simple but powerful tool to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. They are especially important for children too young to get the vaccine yet.

Read on for answers to some frequently asked questions about masks and children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Why do we still need to wear face masks?

It is possible to have COVID-19 but not have any symptoms. That's why wearing face masks is still so important as the virus still spreads, especially for unvaccinated children. Well-fitting face masks reduce the chance of spreading SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

## Should children wear masks?

Yes, face masks can be safely worn by all children 2 years of age and older, including most children with special health conditions, with rare exception.

Children should **not** wear a mask if they are under 2 years old, however, because of suffocation risk. Also, anyone unconscious or unable to remove a face covering on their own should not wear one.

## When do children need to wear masks?

A recent surge in COVID-19 cases prompted new universal indoor masking guidance to help stop the spread. Universal indoor masking helps protect those not fully vaccinated or eligible for COVID vaccines. A child or adult is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after getting the final dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises that everyone over age 2 wear a face mask at indoor public places right now—whether or not they are vaccinated against COVID-19—in areas where community transmission rates are substantial or high.

In addition, universal indoor mask use should continue in all K-12 schools, regardless of location, for all students, teachers, staff and visitors. The same is true at indoor camps, and while participating in group activities such as most indoor sports and outdoors sports with close contact (unless your child has certain medical or developmental conditions, as advised by their doctor).

Everyone should also continue to wear face masks when traveling. This includes travel on a school bus, plane, train, or other form of public transportation, and at the airport or station.

If you have a medically fragile child or an at-risk adult in your household, you may want to consider having anyone at home who is not fully vaccinated wear masks at home to help protect them. It's also recommended to wear a face mask inside your home if someone you live with is sick with symptoms of COVID-19 or has tested positive.

## How do I help my child get used to wearing a mask?

It is understandable if your child seems afraid of wearing a mask at first. Here are a few ideas that might help make them more comfortable:

- Look in the mirror with the face mask on and talk about it.
- Put a mask 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 mask at home to help your child get used to it.

**For children under 3**, it's best to answer their questions simply in language they understand. If they ask about why people are wearing face masks, explain that sometimes people need to wear them to stay healthy.

**For children over 3**, try focusing on germs. Explain that germs are special to your own body. Some germs are good and some are bad. The bad ones can make you sick. Since we can't always tell which are good or bad, the face masks help make sure you keep those germs away from your own body.

The good news is, children have gotten used to masks and are less likely to feel singled out or strange about wearing them. It has quickly become the "new normal" for all of us.

## What about children with special health care needs?

Children with weakened immune systems or who have health conditions that put that at high risk for infections are encouraged to wear an N95 mask for protection. Those with medical conditions that interfere with cognitive or lung function may have a hard time tolerating a face mask. For these children, special precautions may be needed.

## Is there a "right way" to wear a mask?

Yes. Place the mask securely over the mouth **and** nose and stretch it from ear to ear. It should fit snugly along the sides of the face without any gaps. It can be held on with ear loops or ties. Remember to wash hands before and after wearing it and avoid touching it once it's on. When back home, avoid touching the front of the face mask by taking it off from behind.

Wash and completely dry cloth face masks after each wearing.

**Note:** Face masks should not be worn when eating or drinking. Also, make sure the mask has no choking or strangulation hazards for young children.

## What kind of face mask is best?

Face masks with multiple layers of fabric or disposable, surgical-style masks are fine for most people to wear. Try to find the right size for your child's face.

## How do I keep my child from touching their face mask?

It may be challenging for very young children not to fidget with their face mask, so expect to give your child plenty of gentle reminders. When mask-wearing is reinforced by adults and peers, they will learn to follow directions. Just like children understand that they must wear bicycle helmets and buckle into their car seats, they will learn to wear masks correctly and routinely when needed.

## How do I protect my baby who is too young for a mask?

The most effective way is to urge people outside your household who have close contact with your baby to get vaccinated against COVID and wear face masks.

### Remember

Along with COVID-19 vaccination, physical distancing, hand washing, mask wearing is key to reducing SARS-CoV-2 infection and spread.

If you have any concerns about your child's health, talk with your pediatrician.

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