

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 who are too young for the vaccine. Read on for answers to some frequently asked questions about masks, children, and COVID-19.

Masks work even when others don't wear them

A well-fitting high quality face mask reduces the chance of contracting COVID-19, as well as spreading COVID-19 infection to others. Face masks should not be worn by children if they are under 2 years old. Face masks are strongly encouraged for:

- Vaccinated and unvaccinated people age 2 years and older in areas of the country with high transmission of COVID-19.
- Children who are ineligible for COVID vaccination.
- People with weakened immune systems who may not have mounted a full immune response to the vaccine and are at high risk if they get sick.
- People who want to protect their family members at risk. 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.
- Children and youth with special health care needs who may be vaccinated but still are at higher risk if they get sick.
- Children and teens who lack immunity to the virus despite vaccination or prior infection.
- 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.

Note: Infants and children under 2 years old are too young for the vaccine and too young to wear face masks. To protect them, people who have close contact with infants and young children should wear face masks.

Why wear masks at daycare, preschool or school?

Well-fitting face masks worn by everyone 2 years old and older and adults, including child care teachers, regardless of vaccination status protects them as well as others—especially if they are not vaccinated.

In K-12 schools, students, teachers, staff and visitors should be supported if they continue wearing masks. The same is true for anyone who continues wearing masks for sports.

My child just turned 2. How do I help them get used to wearing a mask?

Face masks have been around for a couple of years, but mask wearing is still new to a child who is turning 2. Here are a few ideas that might help make your child more comfortable when they are getting used to wearing a mask:

- 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.

It may be challenging for very young children not to fidget with their face mask. Expect to give your child plenty of gentle reminders not to touch their face mask. 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 can I explain to my child why they still need a mask at daycare?

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.

What about kids with special health care needs?

Children with weakened immune systems or who have health conditions or special health care needs that put them 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. Families are encouraged to have a plan and discuss appropriate masks and precautions with their pediatrician.

What kind of face mask is best?

Look for a well-fitting comfortable face mask that fits your child's face. The mask should fit securely under the chin but not impair vision, and cover the mouth **and** nose. It should fit snugly along the sides of the face without any gaps. 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.

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.

Remember

Along with COVID-19 vaccination and boosters, mask wearing when recommended and other safety measures such as physical distancing, testing and hand washing are key to reducing SARS-CoV-2 infection and spread. If you have any concerns about your child's health, talk with your pediatrician.

For more information

American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org and www.HealthyChildren.org

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