



June 28, 2020

Hospital for Sick Children
555 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5G 1X8

To the advisory group led by The Hospital for Sick Children (that provided guidance on the safe reopening of schools in September),

We are Canadian physicians who are part of Masks4Canada. Masks4Canada is a grassroots community group consisting of members of diverse backgrounds, with a mission to inform and educate all levels of the Canadian government and the public about the critical role of masks and/or face coverings in reducing the transmission of COVID-19. Masks are a key intervention for containing the pandemic. They help to ensure a safe and sustainable reopening, in order to save both lives and the economy [1].

We have recently reviewed your publication, *COVID-19: Recommendations for School Reopening*. We agree that it is very important for children to return to school in order to reduce the burden of secondary illnesses including mental health concerns, however, it must be done in the safest manner possible to protect children, educators, staff, and their families. We wanted to bring up our concerns regarding the masking recommendations in the report and to reiterate the importance of masks to allow for a safe return-to-school.

The WHO clearly recommends wearing masks in order to reduce COVID-19 transmission [2]. However, your report is not recommending mask-wearing in children due to fears of improper usage. We recommend focusing on educating children on how to use masks properly and improving their access to masks. The report also mentions a lack of evidence of masks for prevention of SARS-CoV-2 in children, however, lack of evidence does not mean there is evidence against masks. There is a growing body of literature supporting the efficacy of masks in reducing COVID-19 transmission [3].

Research has shown that direct person-to-person transmission is the primary means of COVID-19 transmission [4]. Classrooms are indoor enclosed spaces with limited ventilation. Distancing measures cannot be consistently adhered to. It may be worth considering outdoor learning opportunities if possible. In B.C., some schools have young children sit in individually distanced hula hoops outdoors for the entire learning day.

According to reports from the CDC of the United States, approximately 74% of pediatric COVID-19 patients are at least 5 years of age [5]. Children 5 years and older can be taught to use masks properly, just like how they have learned to wear clothes and shoes. We don't ask children to avoid washing their hands if they don't know how - we teach them.



Regarding concerns with the communication of educators when wearing masks, clear masks would allow for facial expressions to be visible. Face shields can also be an option for students who may have difficulties wearing masks.

The Hospital for Sick Children has seen an increase in Kawasaki-like syndrome and Covid toes in children with COVID-19 [6]. Although it is rare, Kawasaki-like syndrome can cause long-term complications and death [7]. If outbreaks occur in schools, inevitably there will be increases in both mild and severe pediatric cases of COVID-19. The report also states that children may be less likely to transmit the virus to others, however outbreaks and deaths of teachers in the schools of other countries have been cited [8]. We must protect our children and educators, as well as their families.

We acknowledge that *COVID-19: Recommendations for School Reopening* is a starting point for stakeholder discussion, and we reiterate our strong recommendations for including masks and/or face shields as critical pieces for further discussion. We hope your committee could please reconsider your recommendation in order to prevent the devastating effects of severe COVID-19 in pediatric populations, and most importantly to reduce the numbers of COVID-19-related pediatric deaths. Any young life lost to COVID-19 is too many.

Sincerely,

Masks4Canada Health Professionals

cc: Dr. Ronald Cohn, President and CEO of SickKids

[1]
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3561560
Pandemics Depress The Economy, Public Health Interventions Do Not: Evidence from the 1918 Flu

[2]
[https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak)
Advice on the use of masks in the context of Covid-19

[3]
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31183-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31183-1/fulltext)
Physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection for prevention of Covid-19

<https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202004.0203/v2>
Face Masks Against Covid-19: An Evidence Review



<http://ftp.iza.org/dp13319.pdf>

Face Masks Considerably Reduce COVID-19 Cases in Germany: A Synthetic Control Method Approach

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340603522_Face_Masks_Against_COVID-19_An_Evidence_Review

Face Masks Against Covid-19: An Evidence Review

https://arxiv.org/pdf/2004.13553.pdf?fbclid=IwARIVJfnyYo5BC_B6psrUTuipymPeBC3f-tO0zAIZ3NUjjnXE2fxOPQjh4UA
Universal Masking is Urgent in the COVID-19 Pandemic: SEIR and Agent Based Models, Empirical Validation, Policy Recommendations

<https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M20-2567>

Cloth Masks May Prevent Transmission of Covid-19: An Evidence-Based, Risk-Based Approach

[4]

<https://wellcomeopenresearch.org/articles/5-83/v1>

What settings have been linked to SARS-CoV-2 transmission clusters?

[5]

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32271728/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6914e4.htm>

Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Children - United States, February 12-April 2, 2020

[6]

<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/05/14/news/ontario-monitors-rare-inflammatory-illness-children-covid-19-connection>

Ontario monitors rare inflammatory illness in children for COVID-19 connection

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/bjd.19163>

Classification of the cutaneous manifestations of Covid-19: a rapid prospective nationwide consensus study in Spain with 375 cases

[7]

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32282440/>

Covid-19 in Children in the United States: Intensive Care Admissions Estimated Total Infected, and Projected Numbers of Severe Pediatric Cases in 2020

[8]

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/05/how-sweden-wasted-rare-opportunity-study-coronavirus-schools>

How Sweden wasted a “rare opportunity” to study coronavirus in schools

<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/06/03/868507524/israel-orders-schools-to-close-when-covid-19-cases-are-discovered>

After Reopening Schools, Israel Orders Them To Shut If COVID-19 Cases Are Discovered

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.cnn.com/cnn/2020/07/06/health/texas-coronavirus-cases-child-care-facilities/index.html>



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Texas coronavirus cases top 1,300 from child care facilities alone