



MASKS FOR KIDS: WHY AND HOW

THE WHY:

- Kids need to be in school - for their mental health and ours.
- Kids can catch and spread COVID-19.
- Masking is a straightforward, safe and effective tool to help prevent outbreaks in schools.
- Masking can be used in addition to other strategies for prevention of viral spread like physical distancing, good hand hygiene, screening for illness and rapid response to any symptoms. The more tools we use, the better chance we have to contain COVID-19.
- From a healthcare perspective, masks play a large role in determining who is at risk after a COVID-19 exposure.
- Universal masking in schools could prevent large-scale school quarantines/closures when COVID-19 is found in some students.
- Kids under 2 years old should not wear masks. If your child has a serious health condition, check with your doctor to find out if masking is appropriate.

THE HOW:

- Masking is a new skill and needs to be taught.
- Kids need time to learn and adapt to this new skill before they are expected to implement it for extended periods of time.
- Learning to mask properly is not a skill that can or should be taught on the first day of school.
- Teachers can then reinforce the skills learned at home.
- If most kids can learn this skill at home, good peer modeling can help kids who are not able to master masking at home.





30 Day Plan to Help Kids Learn to Mask:

DAY 1

- * Talk with your child about masking. Explain why it is important and how it can help keep everyone safe and healthy and help us get back to our previous activities, like school.
 - * Choose a mask from the wide variety of masks available. Kids may be more likely to try a mask if they have helped pick out the mask. There are so many different styles and designs to choose from - the goal is a piece of fabric that can cover the nose and mouth and stay in place with normal movement and talking.
 - * Wash the mask before wearing it.
- *Avoid masks with an exhalation valve since those masks allow droplets to pass from the wearer to other people around.*

DAY 2

- * Now that the new mask is clean and dry, have your child try it on.
 - * Play around, talk, yell, jump up and down. Is the mask staying in place?
 - * If the fit is not great, there are strategies and products to help improve fit. There are straps that secure the ear loops behind the head instead of behind the ears. There are plastic cord lock/buckle pieces that make the ear loops adjustable.
 - * Try talking, running, jumping and playing in the mask again. If it still doesn't fit well, you may need to try a different style or size of mask.
 - * Kids may not (ok, probably won't) like the way the mask feels at first. This is ok. It doesn't mean they cannot wear one. It would almost be odd if kids loved masking from day one. But maybe you'll get lucky!
- *If your child persistently complains about the feel of the fabric, check it and if it feels rough, select a different mask. There are masks made of t-shirt material, wicking athletic material, fleece, etc. The skin of the face is sensitive, so trying a few different materials may be in order.*

DAY 3

- * Now the work begins.
- * Have your child wear the mask for 5 minutes of indoor activity 3 times today.
- * Don't stress if your child is constantly touching and adjusting the mask. This is normal. As time goes on, they will adjust to wearing a mask, and the touching and adjusting will get better.
- * If 5 minutes is too long for your child, use shorter intervals, but try to get 15 minutes of cumulative mask-wearing time throughout the day.



***If your child complains of shortness of breath with short duration of mask wear, consult your pediatrician for further guidance. Never force continuous wear.**

DAY 4

- * Have your child wear the mask for 5 minutes of indoor activity 3 times today.
- * Don't stress if your child is constantly touching and adjusting the mask. This is normal. As time goes on, they will adjust to wearing a mask, and the touching and adjusting will get better.
- * If 5 minutes is too long for your child, use shorter intervals, but try to get 15 minutes of cumulative mask-wearing time throughout the day.

DAY 5

- * Have your child wear the mask for 5 minutes of indoor activity 3 times today.
- * You may have noticed the focus on indoor activity. Outdoor activities rarely require masks. Outdoor time at school will be a nice break from masking.

DAY 6 & DAY 7

- * No masks! Give your kids weekend breaks. They need to ease into this and have a break from thinking about masks or COVID-19.
- * Praise them for their efforts this week. Wash the mask(s).
- * Use this time for make-up time if you missed any days earlier this week.

→ *Weekend breaks are for this training plan. If your child is going out in public with you where they cannot maintain a 6 foot distance at all times, or if you are indoors in public, they should absolutely be wearing a mask.*

DAY 8

- * Have your child wear the mask for 10 minutes 3 times today.
- * Remember to vary the activities.
- * If 10 minutes is too much, back off to a lower number as long as it is more than 5 minutes.

DAY 9

- * Have your child wear the mask for 10 minutes 3 times today.
- * Is your child touching and adjusting the mask less? If so, praise them. If not, don't worry. They will get there.
- * Reinforce the importance of covering the nose and mouth when wearing the mask.

DAY 10

- * Have your child wear the mask for 15 minutes 3 times today.
- * Consider a treat at this point for all of the hard work you guys are putting into this effort. (Could be something sweet and frozen or maybe renting a new release movie at home.)

DAY 11

- * Have your child wear the mask for 15 minutes 3 times today.

DAY 12

- * Have your child wear the mask for at least 15 minutes and try for 20 minutes 3 times today.
- * Shoot for longer times today, reminding your child that they are about to have a 2 day mask break.

DAY 13 & DAY 14

- * No masks!
- * Check in with your child and see how they are feeling about masking. Is it getting easier? Would they like to try a different style of mask?
- * At this point, consider getting more masks. Ideally, once school starts, your child will have at least 5 masks.
- * Masks are like underwear and shouldn't be worn more than one time between washings. And like underwear, discuss with your child that masks are not to be shared with friends, loaned or traded.
- * Wash the mask(s)!!!



DAY 15

- * Have your child wear the mask for 20 minutes 3 times today.
- * Remember to mix up activities.
- * Focus on talking in a mask this week. Your child should be able to talk for extended periods of time without losing the good fit of the mask.

DAY 16

- * Have your child wear the mask for 20 minutes 2 times today, and challenge them to increase the third session to 25 minutes.
- * By this point, you should definitely notice less touching and adjusting of the mask. If your child is still fidgeting with the mask, talk to them about why they touch the mask often. If it's a fit issue, try some of the strategies mentioned above including considering a different mask. If they don't know why they are touching it, consider a sensory toy (stress ball, fidget spinner) to distract their hands from the mask.

DAY 17

- * Have your child wear the mask for 15 - 18 minutes 4 times today.
- * Reinforce keeping the nose and mouth covered at all times, even when talking. A mask is not a beard or a mustache - it needs to completely cover both the nose and the mouth.

DAY 18

- * Have your child wear the mask for 20 minutes 4 times today.

DAY 19

- * Have your child wear the mask for 20 minutes 2 times and then 25 minutes 2 times today.

DAY 20 & Day 21

- * No masks!
- * Consider some more positive reinforcement for all of the hard work you guys are doing! (Maybe a family hike or other outdoor activity?)

DAY 22

- * This week is about rapidly ramping up the time.
- * Have your child wear the mask for 25 minutes 4 times today.
- * Purchase a reusable plastic container or disposable paper lunch bags for mask storage at school when not in use.

➔ *If some schools will allow it, Command hooks attached to desks would also be a great way to store masks between wearing them.*

DAY 23

- * Have your child wear the mask for 30 minutes 2 times and then 35 minutes 2 times today. Keep the nose and mouth covered whenever the mask is on. Don't pull it down to talk.

DAY 24

- * Have your child wear the mask for 35 minutes 2 times and then 45 minutes 2 times today.
- * Start practicing removing the mask and folding it so that the inside/face-side of the mask does not touch the outside of the mask. Once it is folded properly, it is ready to be stored between sessions in the container or bag you bought.
- * When everyone is masking, contamination of the outside of the mask is less of a worry, but proper storage when not in use will lower an already low risk even more.
- * Once in school, the paper bag should be disposed of every night and a new bag taken to school each day or the plastic container should be cleaned with disinfecting cleaner or soap and water every night.

DAY 25

- * Have your child wear the mask for 45 minutes 4 times today.

DAY 26

- * Have your child wear the mask for 50 minutes 2 times and then 55 minutes 2 times today.

DAY 27 & DAY 28

- * No masks!!!!
- * Remember to give lots of praise for hard work and consider another round of positive reinforcement with a treat of some sort. (Maybe family game night with kid's choice of games?)
- * If your child enjoys arts and crafts, decorating the reusable plastic container or the stack of paper lunch bags might be a fun activity.

DAY 29

- * Wear the mask for 55 minutes 4 times today.
- * Make sure the nose and mouth are covered whenever the mask is on.
- * By now, your child should be able to comfortably talk, play, walk around and go about their daily indoor activities with the mask on.
- * Continue to practice taking it off and storing it with minimal contact with the outside surface of the mask.

DAY 30

- * Wear the mask for 60 minutes 4 times today.
- * Now your child is ready to wear a mask at school.
- * Some school days may involve slightly more mask wear and some may involve less, but this schedule should prep your child for extended proper wear.



Beyond the Schedule...

- 1 Continue to practice 45-60 minutes 4 times daily until school starts.
- 2 Keep taking breaks on the weekends, as needed.
- 3 Continue reinforcing proper wearing and storage.
- 4 Build up a nice collection of masks your child likes. Continue to look for innovative designs that improve comfort and fit. You may also check with friends to see what they are wearing since kids (especially older ones) might prefer to look similar to their peers.



Other Thoughts...

- * This was designed with elementary age kids in mind but can be modified as needed for older or younger kids. Remember, kids under 2 years old should not wear face coverings.
- * Another note on teens: They may struggle with “maskne” which is acne related to masking. Using masks made with wicking fabric and an over-the-counter acne wash may help head this off before it starts. Consult your pediatrician or dermatologist if this becomes an issue. Acne is not a reason to refuse to mask. Teens are MORE likely to be infected, spread infection and become very ill if infected.
- * This schedule is not going to be perfect for every kid. Be flexible and adjust as needed. Even if your child cannot work up to 4 hours a day, every bit of progress they make before the start of school helps.
- * Many schools may not mandate masks initially, but health experts anticipate significant school spread, so masks may become part of the response to outbreaks. Practice now so your child is ready.
- * Remember that masking is not only important for the health and safety of your child, but also for the health and safety of the adults we entrust with the daily care of our children while at school. We need to protect our teachers, administrators and staff so we will have healthy, thriving schools once this pandemic is over!

Source: Garland Gail Youngblood, MD

