

Research Supports Universal School Masking

September 7, 2021

On Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021 Gov. Wolf announced a statewide school masking mandate for students and staff beginning on Sept. 7, 2021. PSEA supports universal school masking as an evidence-based and data-informed approach to keeping PA schools open for face-to-face instruction.

- A large body of peer-reviewed research supports universal school masking as a critical element of a multi-layered approach to decreasing the spread of COVID-19 in schools.
- More than 70 scholarly publications support masking as an effective COVID-19 mitigation strategy.
- Based on data from April to September 2020, states with the lowest levels of mask wearing were more likely to have higher levels of COVID-19 infection the following month. None of the states with 75% or higher masking levels had high COVID-19 infection rates the following month.
- Evidence for masking demonstrates efficacy within a multi-faceted context similar to that available in PA schools. This can include masking in combination with COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, handwashing, increased ventilation, health screening, social distance, or other non-pharmaceutical interventions.
- Adding mandatory masking to existing COVID-19 mitigation measures and optional masking can lead to significantly low COVID-19 spread.
- The increased contagiousness of the COVID-19 Delta variant will likely produce increased infections and related absenteeism in schools that do not require universal masking and weekly testing.

Rates of COVID-19 continue to rise in Pennsylvania with a heightened prevalence among children, many of which are not yet eligible for vaccination against COVID-19.

- COVID-19 cases in Pennsylvania (both in per population and per test terms) have been rising since July.
- Nationwide, COVID-19 cases have been rising among school-aged children.

Scientists and doctors have said that wearing masks in schools is a lifesaving safety measure that can help protect students and staff from contracting COVID-19.

- In July the American Academy of Pediatrics “strongly” recommended the use of masks for all K-12 students arguing that masks can be safely worn by all children 2 years of age and older.
- Several studies indicate that masking in children over age two is safe and, “has no significant adverse health effects for wearers.
- Mask use has been found to be safe and is not associated with clinically significant impacts on respiration or gas exchange.
- Adopting universal masking policies can help avert future lockdowns, especially if combined with other non-pharmaceutical interventions such as social distancing, hand hygiene, and adequate ventilation.”