

Why masks?

As you've not doubt heard, the Mitchell School Board, on July 13, passed on a unanimous vote, a mandate for students and staff to wear masks in school once the new year begins. Good arguments were made on both sides of the issue but those advocating masks in school won the day.

Why? Well, for a least a couple of reasons.

First, many of our local physicians as well as the South Dakota State Medical Association have made it clear that masks are the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the school setting. Copies of the local letter and the state press release can be found below.

Second, masks also provide the best chance for us to have school with students and teachers physically present in the classroom.

With those two powerful reasons in mind, we'll be requiring masks for all on August 19, the first day of school.

Are there any masks that won't fulfill the requirement?

Though most masks will work fine, certain kinds won't prevent transmission of the virus, according to health officials. Thus, face shields and masks with 'onne-way vents' won't meet the requirement.

To the Mitchell Public School District,

As medical experts in the community and concerned parents, many of us with children in the Mitchell school district, we wanted to communicate some medical considerations in helping the Mitchell Public School Board to make difficult decisions while working to reopen schools for the 2020-2021 school year. We all want the children of our communities to return to school so that they can get the strong education that they deserve and that the local schools provide. However, we also want the students, their families, and the community that supports the schools to feel as safe and comfortable as possible with school attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, we do not want to close the schools down again because of a resurgence of COVID-19.

We now know that social distancing, frequent hand washing, and wearing some kind of face covering are all measures that can be taken to best reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and assure the best safety while we return to our regular activities, including school. The CDC has made specific recommendations about implementing these measures to assist schools in reopening. The South Dakota State Medical Association (SDSMA) has strongly recommended following the CDC guidelines which are developed based on the most up to date knowledge and understanding of how COVID-19 spreads.

There is a preponderance of research and information showing that face coverings help reduce the spread of COVID19. The World Health Organization (WHO), CDC, and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) all recommend and support wearing masks to reduce the speed of COVID19 transmission. "Face Masks Against COVID-19: An Evidence Review" is a thorough review by a group of physicians and scientists developed by editors of the British Medical Journal that collaborated with physicians from major medical centers within the United States, China, and the UK which shows strong evidence for wearing masks.

The CDC and AAP both recommend wearing some form of face covering for students. These organizations recommend requiring face coverings for high school and middle school. For elementary school it may be best to strongly encourage and help the younger students get used to wearing face coverings and washing hands frequently.

Making young children and teens wear masks will be challenging, and no one would expect everyone to wear them perfectly in all settings, but making this a part of the expected school culture, while educating and helping the students to learn the importance of hand washing and wearing masks during this pandemic, not only serves the purpose of protecting the community's health, but also serves to provide important education which we expect to happen at our public schools.

Face coverings or masks should be strongly recommended and encouraged for the safety of each student, student's families, classmates, teachers, and other school staff. An active decision to not wear masks doesn't just affect that student, but it affects the other classmates and their families from being comfortable getting their own public education, which is required by law.

Thank you for considering these professional perspectives. Please feel welcome to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Mitchell Community Pediatricians and Physicians,

/s/ Jesse Barondeau, MD FAAP
/s/ Jennifer Tegethoff, MD FAAP
/s/ Hillary Rockwell, MD
/s/ Scott VanKeulen, MD
/s/ Darren Manthey, MD
/s/ Trevor Meaney, MD
/s/ Michael Gerlach, MD
/s/ Jonathan Olegario, MD

/s/ Xenofon Papadopoulos, MD
/s/ Theresa Campbell, MD
/s/ Jacob Thomas, MD
/s/ Mandi Greenway, MD
/s/ Jessica Claussen, MD
/s/ Phillip Becker, MD
/s/ Megan Kippes, DO
/s/ Lucio Margallo, MD

The following recommendations made previously from area physicians and presented by Dr Hilary Rockwell should be implemented to protect the school system and community:

I have reviewed some more recommendations for school openings and asked for input from our Avera Pediatricians and Family Practitioners. Below are recommendations we are making:

1. Masks: masking elementary students will be difficult and risk of spreading infection (touching masks and face more often) may outweigh potential benefit. That being said, with education and time, the students may do well at masking. As with all things related to COVID, we have to be ready to make changes as necessary and be fluid. Consider traditional masks as well as scarves or other neck coverings that can be pulled over the face such as a balaclava. Teachers may want to consider face shields rather than masks for areas where students need to see their mouths.

Junior high and high school students should wear masks. Encourage proper handling of masks: the mask should cover nose and mouth, avoid touching the mask and your face, when you remove your mask, set it on a clean paper towel or paper. Perform hand hygiene before and after handling the mask.

2. Cleaning equipment: Cleaning outdoor equipment during the day will be difficult and likely not practical. Have students wash hands before and after recess/use of outdoor equipment. Clean balls and other toys after use and from one cohort to another.

3. Cohort students as much as possible. Limit movement out of classroom and move cohorts at different times of day to avoid interaction between groups. Consider one way hallways, eliminating lockers, block scheduling, setting up pick up and drop off times to limit numbers arriving/leaving at the same time.

4. Wash hands and use hand sanitizer frequently. Eliminate high touch surfaces such as lockers if possible. Have students bring their own water bottles rather than use the water fountain. Have each student bring a hand sanitizer bottle that can be kept at their desk and refilled.

5. Clean high touch areas frequently, at least 3 times daily. Contact Brennan Yeo (Brennan.Yeo@Avera.org) for questions regarding cleaning solutions and plans.

6. Screening - Screen staff daily. You could consider a screening station on entering the building and having all staff enter the same door; self screening; screening cohorts (for example, in clinic the staff screen each other in their respective clinic); a screening app (DWU is doing this). I will forward you our current screening question/form.

7. Education: This will be very important. We will put together an educational pamphlet to send home with students discussing symptoms, isolation, masks, hand washing, reasons to contact your doctor, symptomatic treatment, testing.

8. Consider outdoor education as much as possible while the weather allows.

9. Be prepared for a cohort or class to be out of school if there is an exposure.

10. How many students per classroom? This really depends on the size of the room. Try to spread students out at least 3 feet.

11. Have one contact person for exposures or symptoms per school. They should keep up to date on current recommendations and isolation protocols as these change frequently.

Please refer to the CDC and SDDOH for updated guidelines and recommendations.

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SDSMA Urges All School Districts in South Dakota to Require Face Coverings

SIOUX FALLS – July 22, 2020 — South Dakota State Medical Association President Benjamin C. Aaker, MD, writing on behalf of the association’s nearly 2,000 members, sent a letter on Tuesday, July 21 to school board presidents at each public school in South Dakota, urging them to require face coverings for the 2020-21 school year.

“It is important for everyone who will be in school buildings to wear face coverings this fall,” Dr. Aaker said. As discussions continue over how our schools can safely open during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring educators, staff and students to wear face coverings is an effective way to keep everyone safe.”

The SDSMA joins the [CDC in calling for all Americans to wear a face covering to prevent COVID-19 spread](#). A [recent piece](#) in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* reviewed the latest science and affirms that cloth face coverings are a critical tool in the fight against COVID-19 that could reduce the spread of the disease, particularly when used universally within communities.

In addition to asking school districts across the state to adopt face covering requirement policies, the SDSMA is recommending school districts adopt [CDC guidelines for keeping youth athletes safe](#).

The full text of the letter sent by the SDSMA is below:

As schools prepare for the fall 2020 school year, the South Dakota State Medical Association (SDSMA) strongly recommends school districts to require educators, staff and students to wear face coverings and follow CDC guidelines related to youth sporting activities.

On July 14, 2020, the CDC issued a guideline recommending that Americans wear masks to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. In that statement, the CDC affirmed that cloth face coverings are a critical tool in the fight against COVID-19 and their use could reduce the spread of the disease when used universally within communities.

The CDC guideline for face coverings is based on two recent studies. One study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), concluded that adherence to universal masking policies reduced SARS-CoV-2 transmission within a Boston hospital system, and the second, published in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), showed that wearing a mask prevented the spread of infection from two hair stylists to their customers in Missouri.

In agreement with CDC guidelines, the SDSMA believes that everyone should wear a cloth face covering when leaving their homes, regardless of having symptoms of COVID-19, with the exception of young children under the age of 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

Cloth face coverings may prevent the person wearing the mask from spreading COVID-19. If everyone were to wear a cloth face covering when out in public the risk of exposure to COVID-19 can be reduced for the community. Since people may spread the virus before symptoms start, or for those who have the virus but show no symptoms, wearing a cloth face covering may protect others around you. Additionally, face coverings worn by others may protect you from getting the virus from people carrying it.

Additional CDC guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19 include:

- *Staying home as much as possible;*
- *Practicing social distancing by remaining at least 6 feet away from others; and*
- *Washing hands often.*

The SDSMA strongly recommends that as boards are considering their plans for the 2020-21 school year they follow CDC guidelines and consider requiring cloth face coverings for educators, staff and students when in public including in schools. Schools should also follow CDC guidelines for keeping youth athletes safe. The SDSMA believes that by following these guidelines schools can protect the health of educators, staff and students who will be in classrooms and on the field together with others for up to five days a week for seven hours a day. We strongly recommend that boards adopt this same position.

Sincerely,



*Benjamin C. Aaker, MD
SDSMA President*

The SDSMA serves physicians, residents and medical students who are dedicated to the health of South Dakotans. The mission of the SDSMA is to promote the art and science of medicine, protect and improve the health of the public, and advocate for the well-being of physicians and patients and the best environment for physicians to advance quality health care. Learn more about the SDSMA at www.sdsma.org.