



Kim Dawson <kim.dawson@edcgov.us>

comment for Item 2021-1039

1 message

Nancy Williams <nancy.williams@edcgov.us>

Mon, Jun 28, 2021 at 2:11 PM

To: Kim Dawson <kim.dawson@edcgov.us>, Donald Ashton <don.ashton@edcgov.us>

Cc: The BOSONE <bosone@edcgov.us>, The BOSFIVE <bosfive@edcgov.us>, The BOSFOUR <bosfour@edcgov.us>, The BOSTWO <bostwo@edcgov.us>, The BOSTHREE <bosthree@edcgov.us>, Don Semon <don.semon@edcgov.us>, "Olivia Byron-Cooper, MPH" <olivia.byron-cooper@edcgov.us>

Hi Kim,

I am attaching a comment from me to be attached to Item 2021-1039. I have cc'ed all five board members.

The document is a PDF with hyperlinks. If the hyperlinks will get lost when posting, please let me know and I can add the links to the end instead.

Thank you,

Nancy

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 **Health Officer Input - Reso 21-1039 final.pdf**
510K

This draft resolution is incomplete, leading it to present a biased view of the important issue of children and mask-wearing. It was developed without input from the health officer or public health staff. Should the board vote on such a resolution, even one that is more symbolic than practical, board members should see all of the pertinent factors, not just the ones that support the position taken by the resolution's author.

To that end, some additional facts are presented below.

- **Masks are known to be highly effective in preventing COVID-19 transmission.**

In a recent [Science Brief](#), CDC concluded after thoroughly studying the issue is that the wearing of masks, specifically non-medical cloth masks, by the general public has had significantly positive effects on curbing COVID-19 transmission.

Mask-wearing was likely the most important intervention applied in our schools that resulted in the significant achievement of having had little to no documented in-classroom transmission. It wasn't distancing, which was not achievable. While they don't hurt, extra hand-sanitizing and deep cleaning are now thought to play a minimal role in prevention of spread of COVID-19.

- **Mask-wearing has not been proven to be harmful to the wearers' health.**

In [the same brief](#), CDC also concluded that mask wearing has no significant adverse health effects for wearers. (While under some circumstances, a person wearing a mask may feel some shortness of breath, the body compensates and the important physiologic conditions in the body remain stable, i.e., deliverance of oxygen to body tissues. Wearing a mask might be considered similar to traveling to a higher elevation where the air's oxygen concentration is lower and one's body compensates by raising heart and/or respiratory rates.)

I am not certain, but expect that the source of the WHEREAS statement that "recent studies have shown that repeated exposure to mask wearing over longer periods can be measurably harmful" may have been [this article](#). The article is published in a respected journal and is legitimate. However, the data on which the conclusions were based came from New York City healthcare providers at the beginning of the pandemic. The study was a survey, not a physiologic study. It was performed in May 2020, at which time NYC was still in its first surge, suggesting that other factors may have been in play. That was a very stressful time for NYC healthcare workers. The majority surveyed wore N95 masks and the remainder wore medical masks, throughout entire work shifts. The authors even noted as a limitation to their study that, "issues such as stress level and quality sleep were also not included in this survey, and these important factors could also attribute to adverse effects in the survey respondents." The [CDC Science Brief](#) referenced above comprises a much broader look at long-term observation of mask-use so I trust it more than this small survey performed very early in the pandemic.

- **WHO recommends masks be worn by children 12 years and older.**

In addition to the information offered in the draft resolution, [WHO also stated](#), "WHO and UNICEF advise that children aged 12 and over should wear a mask under the same conditions as adults." (I am just adding this to the WHO quotes included in the resolution draft.)

- **Children in California are no longer required to wear masks outdoors, even at school.**

The requirement in California for children to wear masks while outdoors expired on 6/15/2021, so the “WHEREAS” related to children wearing masks during exercise or play is mostly moot. ([See answer to “Do fully vaccinated people ever have to wear face coverings?”](#) on CDPH’s face coverings FAQ page.)

- **We cannot ignore that children are part of to the chain of COVID-19 transmission that sometimes reaches vulnerable people and causes bad outcomes**

While the resolution does now include reference to the fact that children are part of the chain of transmission, it is a key point that I will elaborate on. I refer to [another CDC Science Brief](#), this one about COVID-19 transmission in K-12 schools. It contains a lot of information about susceptibility among children as well as severity of disease. There’s little dispute that COVID-19 affects kids to a lesser degree, but the fact that kids are part of the transmission chain that affects the more vulnerable people shouldn’t be overlooked. CDC states, “Similar to adults with SARS-CoV-2 infections, children can spread SARS-CoV-2 to others when they don’t have symptoms or have mild, non-specific symptoms and thus might not know that they are infected and infectious.

We need to ask ourselves, when people in nursing homes, for example, contract COVID-19 today – and we had such an outbreak this May and June – how did it get there? The residents rarely leave the facility. COVID was brought to them, either by visitors or by staff members. Could these people have had children from whom they acquired COVID-19?

- **Teachers’ vulnerability will increase if unvaccinated students are not masked.**

It may be true that teachers are no more likely to be hospitalized due to COVID-19 than other workers. One likely explanation is the protective factor of students having worn masks all last year.

Again, in [the CDC Science Brief on K-12 schools](#), CDC says, “Significant secondary transmission of SARS-CoV-2 infection can and does occur in school settings when prevention strategies are not implemented or are not followed.”

- **Students’ vulnerability will increase if unvaccinated students are not masked.**

If children under age 12 are not yet eligible for vaccination at the time school resumes in the fall, all of them will be vulnerable to becoming infected and to contributing to the chain of transmission that includes vulnerable people. If mask-wearing decisions were left to school districts or to individuals and parents are allowed to send unvaccinated students to school with instructions not to wear masks, those parents will be putting their own children, themselves, the other children in the classroom, and all of the people they are connected to at risk of being exposed to COVID-19.

Because so many kids get minimal or no symptoms from COVID-19 infections, the instruction to stay home when sick, although it is a mainstay of preventing transmission of many diseases, only goes so far. With regard to COVID-19, mask-wearing is by far the most effective preventive measure for ensuring that in-person learning can continue to be available to and safe for all children

and teachers.

- **Mental or social issues experienced by children during the pandemic were caused by multiple factors. Masks likely played little if any role.**

Most everyone agrees that the past year has been difficult for children with respect to their mental and social wellbeing. However, CDC's statistics about increased mental health visits do not identify a specific cause. There are many possible causes. The one that was probably the most significant was the social isolation caused by distance rather than in-person learning. Another significant factor contributing to distress among children likely related to the illness itself, which can be severe and in some instances caused the hospitalizations or deaths of family members.

While children in El Dorado County may have experienced less illness among their family members than occurred in some parts of the country, undoubtedly some of them lost grandparents or had other relatives who were hospitalized or experienced lasting symptoms from COVID. CDC's statistic on mental-health visits account for the entire country and are not necessarily representative of El Dorado County students, who spent much greater than average time in the classroom compared with most of the state if not the entire country.

- **12% of 10,428 cases (total reported in EDC through 6/25/21) is not negligible.**

Consider those 1251 children 0-17 years of age who were diagnosed with COVID-19 infections. The following surely occurred...

- Some of them transmitted virus to friends, family members, classmates, or strangers.
- Some of them had to miss in-person school and after-school activities.
- Some of them exposed other people who then had to be quarantined and had to miss school, work, and other activities.
- Some of the friends, family members, classmates, or strangers who acquired infections from them further transmitted COVID-19 to even more people.

Because children are less likely to have severe if any symptoms, 1251 is likely a significant undercount of the actual number of children who have been infected to date. If it were the true value, it would mean that, except for those who have been vaccinated, up to 88% of children in our county are still susceptible to COVID-19.

- A personal observation is that many children in California and within El Dorado County, specifically, as well as their parents, have tolerated, and, more than that, encouraged, mask-wearing as a protective measure for themselves and people around them.

In conclusion, for people who remain unvaccinated, choosing not to wear masks may put *other people* at risk of infection with COVID-19, a serious disease that has killed more than 600,000 people so far in the U.S. The most effective solution to addressing this pandemic is vaccination, but until almost everyone is vaccinated, masks continue to be the mainstay for protecting unvaccinated people.

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