



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Enquiries: Prof S Abdool Karim  
E-mail: salim.abdoolkarim@caprisa.org

**INTERNAL MEMO**

Date:	10 September 2020		
To:	<b>The Honorable Dr ZL Mkhize, Minister of Health</b>	From:	<b>Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on Covid-19</b>

**MASKS FOR CHILDREN OF SCHOOL GOING AGE**

**Request for Advisory sent to MAC/Problem/Concern**

The MAC on Covid-19 was requested to review published guidance by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)<sup>1</sup> on use of masks in children.

**Points of consideration**

- The WHO & UNICEF analysed the available published evidence on the use of cloth masks as a means of source control for those under the age of 18 years.
- Children below 5 years had less symptomatic disease, lower amounts of viral RNA in respiratory secretions compared to school children, adolescents and adults. However, those children below 5 with mild to moderate Covid-19 have higher amounts of viral RNA in their upper respiratory samples compared with older children and adults.<sup>2</sup>
- Children between 5 and 11 years old were significantly less protected by masks possibly due to inferior fit.
- Children reported factors such as warmth, irritation, breathing difficulties, discomfort, distraction, poor acceptability.<sup>3</sup>
- Disabled children found it difficult to tolerate wearing masks.

**References**

<sup>1</sup>. WHO: Advice on the use of masks for children in the community in the context of COVID-19 (21 August, 2020).  
<sup>2</sup>. Heald-Sargent T, Muller WJ, Zheng X, Rippe J, Patel AB, Kociolek LK. Age-Related Differences in Nasopharyngeal Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) Levels in Patients With Mild to Moderate Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). JAMA Pediatr. 2020. Epub 2020/08/04.  
<sup>3</sup>. Chen X, Ran L, Liu Q, Hu Q, Du X, Tan X. Hand Hygiene, Mask-Wearing Behaviors and Its Associated Factors during the COVID-19 Epidemic: A Cross-Sectional Study among Primary School Students in Wuhan, China. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2020;17(8). Epub 2020/04/26.

**Recommendations**

1. Children aged up to 5 years should not wear masks
2. For 6 to 11 years of age, a risk based approach is appropriate, namely that they wear a cloth mask while at school and in public places
3. For > 11 years, they should abide by the mask wearing policy applicable to adults
4. Where masks cannot be worn by children due to disabilities, face shields may be an option for

use by the teachers and students.

5. Children and teachers must take a mask break after every 2 hour period wearing the mask. This means going into the open air, taking off the mask and breathing fresh air for 15 to 20 minutes.
6. Cloths masks must be part of other non-pharmaceutical interventions. The availability of clean running water and sanitation is paramount for the protection of children.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Kind regards,



**PROFESSOR SALIM S. ABDOOL KARIM**

**OVERARCHING CHAIRPERSON: MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COVID-19**

**DATE: 10 September 2020**

**CC:**

- » **Dr S Buthelezi (Director-General: Health)**
- » **Dr T Pillay (Deputy Director-General: National Health Insurance)**
- » **Dr S Zungu (Project Lead: Sectoral Response to Covid-19)**
- » **Incident Management Team**