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Idaho Physicians Offer Guidance on Masks and Children in School

Boise, ID, August 24, 2020 – This summer, physician leaders from local health care groups and hospital systems formed a coalition to provide medical guidance to school boards as they make critical decisions about reopening schools and mitigating transmission risk in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The guidelines developed this week address the issue of masks and children in school: who should wear one, who should be exempt, and details on mask alternatives and their efficacy. These guidelines were delivered to school board presidents and other leaders in education in Idaho on August 23 and are included with this release.

David Peterman, M.D. is CEO of Primary Health and a member of the physician leadership group. He said, “Parents are relieved to have kids back in school, if only part time on a hybrid schedule. Mitigation of disease spread is the most important aspect of making sure the transition back is successful. We know that wearing the correct type of facial covering in the correct way can be very effective at slowing the spread of COVID-19. We hope the guidelines we have developed will be helpful when making policy decisions at schools in Idaho.”

Physician Leaders:

David Pate, M.D., former President and CEO, St. Luke’s Health System
David Peterman, M.D., Pediatrician and CEO, Primary Health Medical Group
Jim Souza, M.D., System Chief Medical Officer, St. Luke’s Health System
John Kaiser, M.D., VP and CMO, Saltzer Health
Joshua Kern, M.D., VPMA for Magic Valley, Jerome and Wood River, St. Luke’s Health System
Kenny Bramwell, M.D., System Medical Director, St. Luke’s Children’s
Mark Nassir, M.D., President, Saint Alphonsus Medical Group
Steven Nemerson, M.D., CCO, Saint Alphonsus Medical Group
Susan Kim, M.D., Physician Director of Pediatric Urgent Care, Primary Health Medical Group
Ted Epperly, M.D., President and CEO, Family Medicine Residency of Idaho

Physician Guidance Regarding Masks and Children in School

September 23, 2020

Children are now returning to school. Plans for the safe return of children to school, childcare and other group settings must include universal use of face coverings of children 2 years and older and the adults they interact with.

When used with other risk mitigating efforts, masks can further reduce the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in public areas including school buildings.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, masks are considered safe for most children and youth over the age of two years including those with underlying health conditions.

There are very few exceptions for not wearing masks. The following examples should help with decision making for which children should or should not wear masks:

1. Should a child with asthma wear a mask?

Yes. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology recommends individuals with asthma wear masks in public.

2. Should a child with autism, intellectual disability, or mental health disorder wear a mask?

Yes. These conditions do not necessarily justify a mask exemption unless the child is unable to wear the mask without excessive trauma or frequent manipulation.

3. Should a child who cannot communicate clearly while wearing a mask wear one?

Yes. Explore instructional adaptations or provide a clear cover in the center of the mask.

4. Children who cannot remove the mask on their own should **NOT** wear a mask.

5. A child who is asleep or unconscious should **NOT** wear a mask.

6. A child who is having difficulty breathing should **NOT** wear a mask.

7. Masks with exhalation valves or vents should not be worn as they do not prevent the person wearing the mask from spreading COVID to others.

8. Face shields are **NOT** an acceptable substitute for masks and do not provide protection for the student or others in the classroom.

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