

Georgia Chapter
American Academy of Pediatrics

1350 Spring Street, #700 Atlanta, GA. 30309
Ph. 404-881-5020 www.gaaap.org

July 20, 2021

An Open Letter to Georgia School Superintendents:

I write today on behalf of the Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, representing over 1,800 pediatricians across our state.

As physicians who care for the children and adolescents of Georgia, we urge school districts to implement protocols that follow guidance released yesterday by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to support safe, in-person learning when students return to school next month. The AAP statement amplifies the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) recommendations previously released on July 9. Specifically, the AAP and the Georgia Chapter want to emphasize the following recommendations to Georgia school superintendents:

- **All students older than 2 years of age and all school staff should wear face masks at school--regardless of their vaccination status--unless medical or developmental conditions prohibit their use.**

We recommend universal masking because a significant portion of the K-12 student population is not yet eligible for vaccination and masking is a proven measure for protecting those who are not vaccinated. Furthermore, schools may not have a system to monitor vaccine status of students (or staff); and some communities have low vaccination rates where the virus may be actively circulating. (No vaccine is yet approved for children under 12; and less than 20% of Georgia adolescents age 12-17 have received the vaccine.)

- **Include multiple layers of other protection such as social distancing and good ventilation.** The recommendations are that schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students in classrooms wherever possible, combined with indoor mask-wearing by people who are not vaccinated, to reduce transmission risk.
- **Continue screening for COVID-19, hand-washing and respiratory etiquette,** staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection to keep schools safe.
- **Encourage COVID vaccinations** for all adolescents, teachers and staff who are eligible.
- **School districts should remain in close contact and coordinate with their local public health authorities, community pediatricians and school nurses.**

Although COVID-19 is more lethal in the elderly and adults, it is not a benign illness in children.

To date, over four million children and adolescents in the United States have been infected with the virus, which represents about 14 percent of COVID-19 cases. Thousands have been hospitalized and several hundred children have lost their lives.

Moreover, even after apparent recovery from the virus, children are susceptible to developing the Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome (MIS-C) characterized by severe inflammation of the heart, kidneys, and other organs, often requiring care in the intensive care unit. COVID-19 infections can also complicate clearance for sports since heart damage caused by the virus may need to be ruled out. In addition, there are increasing reports of “long-COVID” symptoms in youth, characterized by chronic fatigue, headaches and low blood pressure that can be present for months after the initial diagnosis.

As physicians, we are also concerned about reports of the rapid spread of the COVID-19 Delta variant in Georgia, which is more contagious and severe than the original variant.

For these reasons, we urge school districts around the state to be proactive in implementing these guidelines and further ensure they are consistently followed. The good news is that most children successfully wear masks and social distance when they are encouraged to do so.

Ensuring that students safely return to in-person learning is a high priority for Georgia pediatricians and we look forward to a successful and safe school year. If we can be of any assistance, please contact Rick Ward at the Georgia AAP office at 404-881-5091 or at rward@gaaap.org.

Sincerely,



Hugo Scornik, MD, FAAP
President

C: Richard Woods, State School Superintendent
John Zauner, PhD, Exec. Director, Ga. State School Superintendents Association