
Concerning COVID-19

COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020-2023

10-12-2020

Are Masks and Distancing Really Necessary for Low-Risk College Students?

Cedarville University

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CONCERNING COVID: ARE MASKS AND DISTANCING REALLY NECESSARY FOR LOW-RISK COLLEGE STUDENTS?

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October 12, 2020 |



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Question: Why is Cedarville being so strict about masks and physical distancing when the chance of serious illness for college-age students is so low?

Answer:

"The findings showed a reduction in risk of 82% with a physical distance of 1 m (meter) in both health-care and community settings. Every additional 1 m (meter) of separation more than doubled the relative protection, with data available up to 3 m. This evidence is important to support community physical distancing guidelines and shows risk reduction is feasible by physical distancing.

Growing evidence for pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic transmission of SARS-CoV-2 further supports universal face mask use and distancing. In regions with a high incidence of COVID-19, universal face mask use combined with physical distancing could reduce the rate of infection (flatten the curve), even with modestly effective masks. Universal face mask use might enable safe lifting of restrictions in communities seeking to resume normal activities and could protect people in crowded public settings and within households...no one intervention is completely protective and that combinations of physical distancing, face mask use, and other interventions are needed to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic until we have an effective vaccine."

Source: Macintyre, C. R., & Wang, Q. (2020). Physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection for prevention of COVID-19. *The Lancet*, 395 (10242), 1950-1951. doi:10.1016/s0140-6736(20)31183-1

"The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 35% of people with COVID-19 are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic, and that while asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic, they can spread the virus through microscopic drop-lets and aerosols expelled when exhaling, speaking, sneezing, or coughing... Because the principal function of masking is the protection of others, not the mask wearer, schools may argue that exempting a student with a disability from complying with a mask requirement is unreasonable because it would pose a direct threat to the health of others, particularly others who by reason of their health conditions may be at increased risk for a life-threatening COVID-19 infection."

Source: Masinter, M. R. (2020). Mask requirements in the face of uncertain disability rights law. *Disability Compliance for Higher Education*, 26(1), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dhe.30883>

"The findings from this analysis indicate that nearly one in three young adults are medically vulnerable to severe COVID-19 illness (32%)."

Source: Adams, S. H., Park, M. J., Schaub, J. P., Brindis, C. D., & Irwin, C. E.. (2020). Medical Vulnerability of Young Adults to Severe COVID-19 Illness—Data From the National Health Interview Survey. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67(3), 362-368. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.06.025>

Fact Summary:

In summary, masks and social distancing have been shown to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Therefore these interventions are still important in the college population because they could protect the medically vulnerable students (roughly 33% nationally), as well as, the faculty and the community at large. Although your student may not be at severe risk for a serious COVID infection, by following protocol they are protecting those who are vulnerable, especially if one wearing the mask has an unexpected sneeze or cough. Despite the inconvenience of these regulations, we can stay well and care well for each other.

Posted in: [Concerning COVID](#)

2 Comments

Julie Spry says:

[October 13, 2020 at 9:08 pm](#)

There is also evidence that wearing face masks is not effective, so to be fair you should also present that research.

Janice Suplee says:

[October 28, 2020 at 2:28 pm](#)

The Concerning COVID posts are part of a clinical assignment for one of our senior nursing courses. We have appreciated their careful research of a variety of questions that have been submitted from students, parents, and others. Each answer is reviewed by faculty members before we share the information with our readers. In light of your note, we've asked the nursing students to also research the counter-evidence on masks which will be a valuable learning opportunity as well.

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