

Helping Children Wear a Mask



Talking to children about wearing masks during COVID 19 is a new experience for families. It is important to use language simple and straight forward, helping to reassure children they will continue to . Explain to them that everyone at school may be asked to wear a mask. People wear masks to protect each other from the germs that could make us sick. Wearing a mask helps us stay healthy. Let you child know that even if they are wearing a mask their teacher knows who they are. You may find using a Social Story helpful in explaining a mask.

I Getting Started

- Have a variety of masks for your child to wear. Let you child choose their own mask. You can personalize their mask by purchasing one with a favourite design or characters on it or even decorating one with stickers.
- Find out from your school how many masks will be required.
- Label your child's mask. It could get lost just like all the other personal items children lose at school.
- The disposable masks may be cooler to wear than cloth masks. Have your child try on both disposable and cloth masks

2. Model wearing a mask

- You are required to wear mask when you go shopping or into other buildings and you child may have seen you wearing it. Wear you mask at home and show your child how you put it on. Use positive language when you are putting on the mask. Talk to them about how you can still breathe and talk easily when wearing a mask.
- Suggest putting a mask on your child's favourite stuffed animal. Take a picture. Take a family picture of everyone wearing a mask.

- If your child video chats with relatives, ask them to put on a mask and wear it for a few minutes while they talk to your child.

3. Practise Wearing a Mask

You will be able to assess your child's comfort with a mask. Some children will have no trouble at all wearing a mask while others may need some time to adjust.

For a child who has not worn a mask before, start small and build up gradually so your child can stay relaxed. You may have to begin with just having a mask visible on a table in the house before you ask your child to try one on.

Begin by showing your child how you put the mask on. Show them how to take it off and where to put it when they are finished with it. Public Health has guidelines for how to handle your mask.

Here are some steps you can take to help your child get used to a mask. Make sure your child is comfortable with one step before you move to the next. If you just start with one step for the first day that is fine. Comfort is key to success.

- Have your child hold their mask up to their face. Do this several times. Then have them practice wearing with one loop over the ear, then over both ears.
- If your child is apprehensive, have them wear the mask just covering their chin, then add the mouth, then all the way up to just below their nose. Finally, have them wear it in the proper position, covering both their mouth and nose.
- Have your child wear their mask for a few seconds, then build up in small increments until they can wear it for a minute or two. This could take several days. Once they can wear a mask for five to seven minutes, try increasing the time in five-minute increments. Always let your child know how long they will have the mask on. (You may be able to build time up more quickly than this. Follow your child's lead.)
- Have a clear signal for your time goal: Count down or use a timer (digital or visual) to signal when your child can take a break from wearing their mask.
- Your child may feel more comfortable with a favourite toy or stuffed animal wearing a mask along with them.
- Let your child engage in an activity while wearing the mask i. e., reading a book, listening to a story, watching a favourite video or TV show.
- It is important when wearing mask not to touch it or pull at it. Let your child know this and consider giving a special reward for not touching the mask
- Use lots of positive praise throughout!
- If your child takes their mask off before the end time, pause and restart. Praise what went well. If your child is upset wait until they are calm. Try to end each practice session on a positive note: For example, if your goal was a minute but your

child didn't quite get there, make the last practice a 5, 10 or 30 second session, or just have them bring the mask to their face. We want them to end with success.

- Try using a First _____, Then strategy. First, we will practise the mask and they you can _____.

4. Exploring Outside

When your child is comfortable wearing a mask for approximately 30-35 minutes start having your child wear a mask in different settings i.e., during a video chat, in the car, at a store. You can help normalize the experience by taking pictures of family members wearing masks. Don't forget to wear your mask too!

