



Wearing Face Masks and How to Explain It to Kids



As we progress through the coronavirus pandemic, wearing a mask is mandated in many parts of the country.

The facial coverings can be unsettling for children, prompting questions. Below are some common questions and answers that can help parents respond to children and calm their worries.

Why does everyone wear masks in public?

The mask helps stop the spread of the coronavirus. Everyone is being asked to take steps to prevent passing germs from person to person. Keeping at least six feet space between people is one way to do this. For example, stores and other public places have marked the floor or pavement to help remind us about physical distance. However, when you are in public places it may not be possible to stay that far apart. You may pass closely or interact with others at school, the grocery store or in the park. So, it makes sense to wear a mask, as well as do your best to physically distance.

What do the masks do?

Wearing masks, or facial coverings, protects us and others from droplets spread by breathing, coughing, sneezing, singing, or laughing. It is these droplets that can carry a virus from one person to another.

If you are sick it is recommended to stay home and not go to public places even with a mask on. Surgical or hospital-grade masks combined with clear face shields are used by medical personnel and first responders to protect them while they do their jobs.

If the coronavirus is mostly impacting older individuals, why do kids need to wear masks too?

Even if someone does not appear sick, they could be infected with the virus. Before they start to feel sick, that person could spread the virus to others.

Children who are infected with the coronavirus often have mild illness or may not show symptoms at all. However, they are still able to spread the virus. This is why children should also wear masks and do their best to practice physical

distancing. However, children younger than two years old should not be masked, as they are too young to understand and could be at risk of suffocation.

Should masks be worn at home?

Generally, there is no need for a mask at home or in your car when you are with only people you live with. If, however, there is a sick or vulnerable person at home, then family members should wear a mask when they are within six feet of that person. Sick or exposed persons should wear a mask to prevent spread of the virus.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides guidance at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/need-to-know.html>.

Are there creative things parents can do to get children to wear a mask?

Giving children age-appropriate reasons for wearing the mask can be very helpful – meeting your child at their level and answering their questions. You can first start with holding the mask and talking about it. Practice wearing the mask at home with your child and using the mirror for more engagement. Be sure your child can see clearly when wearing a mask.

It could be fun to decorate the mask with your child to increase their ownership of the mask. Families can make a mask from colorful cloth or order from companies that have kid-friendly versions as a way to get kids to buy in.

Remember, practicing patience and repeatedly working with your child is essential.

Where to Get Help

Kids' Link RI at 1-855-543-5465 (KID LINK) is a pediatric behavioral health triage service and referral network that can help parents access treatment for their child.

BH Link at 401-404-5465 enables all Rhode Islanders 18 and older who are experiencing mental health and substance use crises to receive the appropriate services they need as quickly as possible.