

Pennsylvania Chapter

American Academy of Pediatrics 
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The PA Chapter, AAP Responds to Governor Wolf's Lift of the School Mask Mandate, Concluding Masking Remains a Key Factor in Reducing COVID-19 Transmission among Children and the Unvaccinated

(Media, PA) The PA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (PA AAP) does not support and is troubled by the Wolf administration's [press release](#), issued yesterday, identifying a date, January 17, 2022, on which the school mask mandate will likely be lifted. Issued by Acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam via the Disease Control & Prevention Law, the mask mandate, see [here](#), went into effect in schools and daycare settings across the Commonwealth on September 7, 2021 to combat viral transmission of COVID-19 in schools.

While the Wolf administration maintains its position that masking remains a key mitigation factor, recommending that local leaders opt to sustain the order in their communities and schools, the PA AAP fears that lifting the mandate will lead to increased viral transmission, especially among those unvaccinated and immunocompromised. With the CDC's recent EUA approval of the COVID-19 vaccine for children 5-11 y/o on Tuesday, November 2nd, there is still little data on the uptake of the vaccine for this age group. The PA AAP maintains that vaccines alone will not adequately protect against COVID-19 transmission. Leadership within the PA AAP anticipates that it may take some time to see adequate levels of vaccination in schools.

With the fall and—quickly approaching—winter flu season, pediatricians and other primary care providers have been and will continue to see a large influx of patients, including those infected with COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. At that, PA AAP members stress the possibility of increased school absences.

At the August 31, 2021, press conference where PA AAP President Dr. Trude Haecker, MD, FAAP joined Governor Wolf and Secretary Beam to announce the mandate, the Wolf administration cited school closures and quarantine-induced absences as the reality which all stakeholders wished to avoid. Dr. Haecker says, "The PA AAP was disappointed to learn of the Governor's decision to lift the mandate on January 17, 2022. The nation's experience with the COVID virus has been difficult to predict. We had hoped that the state would walk back this school-based mitigation when we achieve higher vaccination rates among children 5-11 years as well as those up to 18 years of age." She continues, "As we approach that deadline, we hope the Governor will use case positivity data and immunization uptake as part of the deciding factors to rescind the mask mandate in schools."

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The Pennsylvania Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics promotes the health, safety and well-being of children and adolescents so they may reach their full potential. For more information, visit <https://www.paaap.org/>.

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