

Iowa school districts with strong teachers unions more likely to adopt mask mandates

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School districts in Iowa were more likely to adopt COVID-19 mask mandates if they had a strong teachers union, according to a study in the

August issue of the journal *Health Affairs*. The new study suggests teachers unions may play a crucial role in ensuring that COVID-19 recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are implemented at the local level.

"Safely reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most pressing public health challenges facing the nation this fall," Adam Dean, lead author and an assistant professor of political science at the George Washington University, said. "Our study suggests teachers unions could play an important role in helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

Dean and his colleagues knew that teachers unions supported mask mandates, but no one had studied the issue to see if union demands lead to the adoption of this important safety measure. To find out, the research team examined proprietary data on school district unionization and mask mandates from the Iowa State Education Association, the [teachers union](#) in the state.

The researchers found that the probability of schools adopting a mask mandate increased along with the teachers' unionization rate. They also found that the political partisanship of union members made a big difference; [school districts](#) with Democratic leaning [union](#) members were more likely than districts with Republican [union members](#) to adopt mask requirements.

Last fall, the CDC strongly encouraged schools to require mask wearing as part of a strategy to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, there was no national requirement for school districts to go along with the recommendation. In Iowa and many other states, policies regarding mask wearing were left up to local [school](#) districts.

Although the study was conducted in Iowa, Dean and his colleagues

think the results may hold true for schools in other states as well. "Our study is the first to look at the role that labor unions play in helping to make schools safer during the pandemic, not just for teachers, but for students and parents as well." Public health experts say that mask mandates in schools can help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, including the Delta variant

More information: Iowa School Districts Were More Likely to Adopt COVID-19 Mask Mandates Where Teachers Were Unionized, *Health Affairs* (2021).

Provided by George Washington University

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