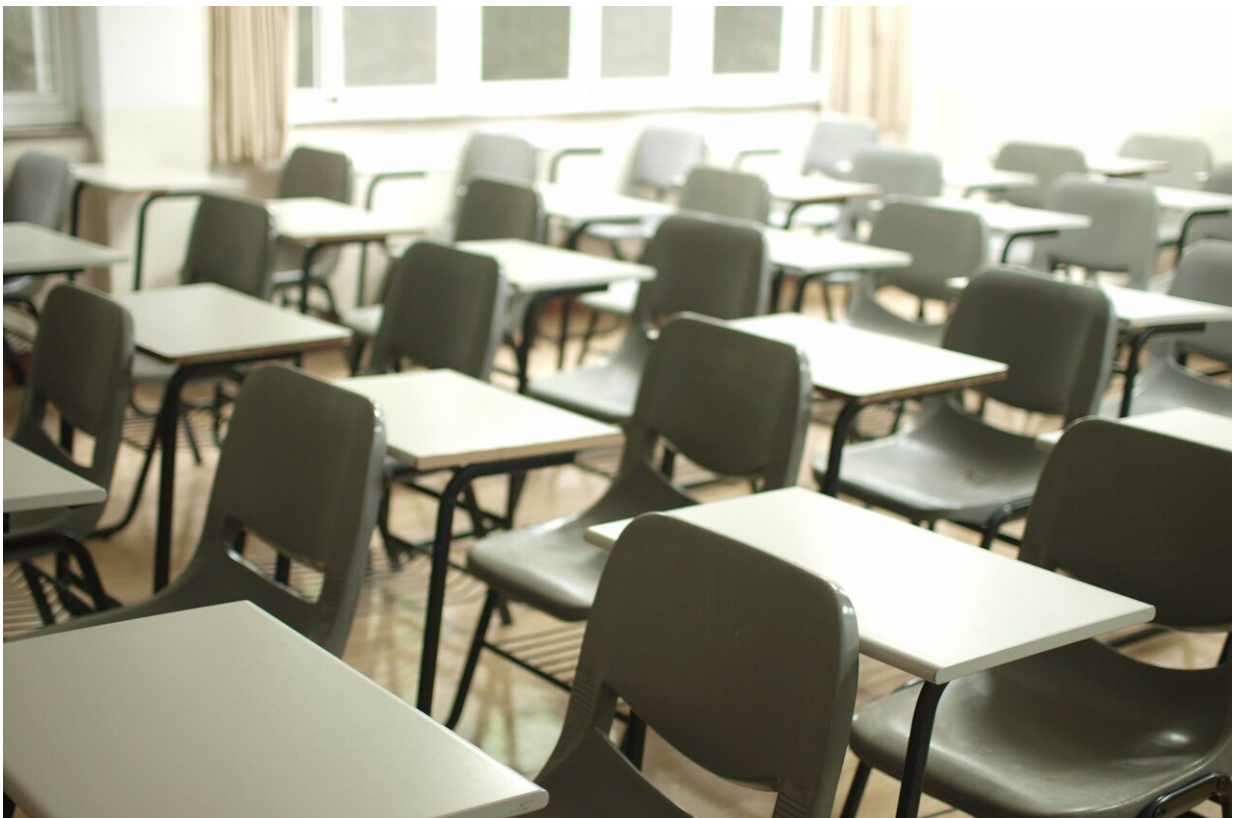


Pediatricians and health officials should present a united front against controversial state masking bans for schools

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To keep in-person learning and protect students in schools, pediatricians and public health officials must advocate for evidence-based mitigation

strategies that can reduce COVID-19 transmission—especially the Delta variant, which overwhelmed pediatric emergency rooms and hospitals, argued Yang et al. in a Perspective published in the journal *Pediatrics*.

The authors propose that pediatricians and their associated institutions actively advocate for masking in schools and debunk myths and misinformation during well and sick visits. In addition, they encourage doctors to develop and disseminate behavioral strategies to support children's compliance with masking based on individual abilities and needs. Finally, providers can partner with educators at the local, district, state and national levels to advocate for evidence-based masking policies.

"As pediatricians, it is our responsibility to advocate for universal masking to facilitate safe in-person schooling for all children," said Sarah Schaffer DeRoo, M.D., [pediatrician](#) at Children's National Hospital and co-author of the Perspective. "Children have readily adapted to masking during the pandemic and continuing this practice in schools is not a significant change from their recent experience."

To date, nine states have enacted policies to prohibit [school](#) masking mandates, disregarding evidence that masking is a crucial COVID-19 preventive measure, Yang et al. wrote. The court overturned these mandates in four states out of the nine because they either exceeded the governor's executive authority or did not comply with the law granting the executive order's authority. In other instances, judges have only placed a temporary block.

"Despite politically charged rhetoric and headline-grabbing lawsuits, evidence shows that schools without mask mandates are more likely to have COVID-19 outbreaks," said Y. Tony Yang, Sc.D., endowed professor of health policy and executive director of the Center for Health Policy and Media Engagement at the George Washington

University, and lead author of the Perspective. "Pediatricians have generally commanded a heightened level of public trust, which suggests that pediatricians who make the case for policies that advance sound medical and public health science may have a greater chance than other advocates of generating the public and political will needed to make evidence-based [policy](#) ideas, such as school mask mandates, a reality."

Some localities have found creative ways to circumvent state mask mandate bans by altering the school dress code to include face coverings and finding loopholes that do not apply to individual cities. Parents have also tried to challenge the policies in court, asserting that mask mandate bans violate federal anti-discrimination laws.

"Continued efforts are needed to ensure schools are able to promote reasonable, evidence-based strategies to promote the health of their students, teachers and communities, and we, as advocates for children, are obligated to emphatically support these efforts," said Yang *et al.*

More information: *Pediatrics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2021-054724](#)

Provided by Children's National Hospital

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