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South Carolina Chapter

INCORPORATED IN SOUTH CAROLINA

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



October 4, 2021

TO: South Carolina School Superintendents
Beth Phipps – Executive Director, SCASA
Scott Price – CEO, SCSBA

The time to protect our children is now. Our children need to wear masks in schools.

In late September, over 200,000 cases of COVID-19 in children nationwide were reported, and South Carolina ranked 2nd in the nation for cases per 100,000 (over 14,000/100,000). Cases are seen more frequently in our offices than this time last year, and the acuity of the illnesses tend to be greater. Post-COVID side effects (such as MISC-C, “long hauler” and others yet to be determined) are particularly distressing to us. Any analysis that states that the overall numbers are decreasing sufficiently is clearly premature.

We represent the over 750 pediatrician members of the South Carolina Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (SCAAP). We share in the desire to have children receive in-school education for their learning, protection, social engagement, nutrition, athletics and so much more. BUT it is not safe until enough people are vaccinated. Until then, children need masks to protect themselves and the school staff.

We want to emphasize four things—

- 1) Judge Mary Geiger Lewis recently granted a temporary restraining order/preliminary injunction against the mask ban proviso (1.108) with an incisive judgment emphasizing that the inability to protect our children with masks was clearly discriminatory to children with disabilities. We would argue that masks are needed to protect all children. (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>)

- 2) Masks are clearly protective. One of two just published studies by the CDC concludes “the results of this analysis indicate that increases in pediatric COVID-19 case rates during the start of the 2021–22 school year were smaller in U.S. counties with school mask requirements than in those without school mask requirements. School mask requirements, in combination with other prevention strategies, including COVID-19 vaccination, are critical to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in schools.” The second study states “given the high transmissibility of the SARS-CoV-2 B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant, universal masking, in addition to vaccination of all eligible students, staff members, and faculty and implementation of other prevention measures, remains essential to COVID-19 prevention in K–12 settings.”

(https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7039e3.htm?s_cid=mm7039e3_w;

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7039e1.htm?s_cid=mm7039e1_w)

- 3) Our own South Carolina public health officials, SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, recommend wearing masks indoors. Educators should educate, and public health officials should be in charge of public health. As physicians, we wholeheartedly support our education partners. We would hope that our educators will rely on the public health professionals for guidance during a pandemic. (<https://scdhec.gov/covid19/protect-yourself-those-around-you-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR3TXjcD4P3rMJSwwWJmOJfMaPemwnVSD3AXh4I63qxnq6U325D87Yw1tDw>)
- 4) While the serious illness rate in children is low, life-threatening illness and death can occur and have occurred. The most recent data from the South Carolina Children’s Hospital Collaborative last week (October 1, 2021) shows 31 children in the hospital, 15 in the intensive care unit, and 4 on the ventilator. These children are teetering on the brink of death. Children have died. We consider any serious illness and/or death to be one too many for a preventable infectious disease.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. Indeed, the delta variant surge has changed everything. We are not asking for masks to be worn forever. Until our public health officials tell us that the pandemic is over and mitigation measures can be altered, we ask for your cooperation to protect our children, in every way possible. Encourage all eligible people to be vaccinated (including your staffs) and ask that everyone in the school setting wear a mask. Do not listen to the vocal

few who equate a misguided privilege to be an impaired freedom. All children deserve to be free of this infection as much as humanly possible.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Robert Saul, MD, in cursive script.

Robert Saul, MD (President, SCAAP)

Handwritten signature of Elizabeth Mack, MD, in cursive script.

Elizabeth Mack, MD (Vice-President, SCAAP)

Handwritten signature of Martha Edwards, MD, in cursive script.

Martha Edwards, MD (Secretary/Treasurer, SCAAP)

Handwritten signature of Kerry Sease, MD, in cursive script.

Kerry Sease, MD (Immediate Past President, SCAAP)