

New Mexico Medical Advisory Team (MAT) Assessment

MAT Workgroup Name: Clinical Workgroup

Date: July 21, 2020

Question or request: Request to clarify guidelines regarding this statement posted to the New Mexico Department of Health website, "Masks will be required of everyone in public places, with exceptions for eating and drinking, and medical requirements," to address masking guidelines for infants and children under the age of 3.

Recommendation/s in bullet form:

We request the Governor please update the language on the NM Department of Health Website to provide additional clarification and recommendations regarding masking for infants and children under the age of 3.

The MAT Clinical Workgroup recommends the following language be added to the NM Department of Health COVID website:

Masks will be required of everyone except infants and children under the age of 3 in public places, with exceptions for eating and drinking, and medical requirements.

- *The United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) does not recommend masks for children under the age of two. Children under the age of 2 may have trouble breathing with a mask on and masks can be a possible choking or strangulation hazard. In addition, NM early childhood and pediatric experts believe children under 2 will have difficulty not touching their mask, and may not be developmentally able to understand the need for the mask; therefore, we recommend masks for everyone 3 and over.*
- *Younger children may not understand why they cannot run up toward other people or touch things they shouldn't, so the recommended approach is to keep them home and in spaces away from other people and common surfaces.*
- *When you return home, the mask should be removed.*
- *For mask purposes, childcare centers are considered public places and children 3 and over should wear masks if possible.*
- *Children with severe cognitive or respiratory impairments may have a hard time tolerating a face mask, so special precautions may be needed with these children. These children may need to maintain greater physical distance from others or may need special equipment to monitor their oxygen levels (e.g. pulse oximeter).*
- *Children with fever or respiratory or gastrointestinal symptoms like a cough, congestion, runny nose, diarrhea, or vomiting should not leave home. Parents/Guardians should contact their primary provider or nurse hotline to discuss these symptoms.*
- *If you must go outside or to a place where you are not able to practice social distancing with an infant, cover the infant carrier with a blanket, which helps protect the baby, but still gives them the ability to breathe comfortably. Do not leave the blanket on the carrier in the car or at any time when the baby and carrier are not in direct view.*

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Assessment:

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control recommend that masks should not be used for infants and children under the age of two because they can represent choking and strangulation hazards.^{1,2} While masks are an effective mechanism for controlling the spread of the virus, many experts believe that the risk of having a child wear a mask can outweigh the benefits associated with reducing the risk of infection.

Red flags and concerns: The available literature and recommendations continue to evolve rapidly. This recommendation should be re-reviewed at regular intervals for changes in CDC or Medical Society guidance and any new and emerging guidelines based on emerging scientific studies.

Contributors:

This recommendation was jointly prepared by the NM MAT Clinical Care Workgroup, the NM Perinatal Collaborative, the NM Pediatric Society with contributions from the following members:

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Resources/Reference:

1 American Academy of Pediatrics, "Masks and Children During COVID-19", Available from: <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/masks-and-children-during-covid-19/> [Accessed May 15, 2020].

2 U.S. Centers for Disease Control, "Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19", Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html> [Accessed May 15, 2020].