

USING HOMEMADE MASKS IN CHILD CARE SETTINGS

THE USE OF HOMEMADE MASKS IS NOT MANDATED BY OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES.

- Your program is not required to use masks for staff for children
- Many programs are beginning to use masks for their staff and children over the age of 3
- It is important to consider Health & Safety Guidelines before introducing masks



PROGRAM POLICY UPDATES:

- Introduce the concept of masks and ask your families and staff for feedback.
- Explain that the mask will not protect from COVID-19 or prevent the spread of virus, but do serve as a barrier and will prevent adults and children from touching their face and mouth.
- Explain that children/staff will not be forced to wear the mask.
- Masks should be put on, once they enter the program to ensure they remain uncontaminated through their commute to school.
- Order masks, asking for at least two per child, with special consideration for children who drool. Ask for a few extra child masks for a reserved supply.
- Explain to staff and parents that masks will need to be washed and returned each day. If families do not have proper means to launder the masks, an alternative plan will be needed for your program. It is not recommended that the program wash the masks.
- Explain that you have ordered masks to keep the program healthy and safe to your staff and families. Explain your storage system and have a similar conversation on level with the children.
- Be sure to communicate any updates regarding mask use to your staff and parents by updating and distributing your policies in writing and asking for their signature to ensure they understand and agree with your updates.
- Be prepared to address any policies that are not being followed.
- Explain that Health and Safety Guidelines/Procedures will be put into place to ensure masks are being handled appropriately—just like procedures in place for soiled clothing or universal precautions related to bodily secretions or blood spills.
- Once delivered, send masks home with parents so they can be laundered before their child wears the mask as you do not know how many people of handled it.
- Ask the parent to label the mask with the child's first and last name.

INTRODUCING MASK USE TO CHILDREN:

- When speaking with children, address questions and concerns openly and honestly, providing just the right amount of information for the age group.
- Revisit your conversations with the children and have adults show children how to put on the masks and wear them so children have the opportunity to get comfortable with the look. Play a guessing game, what kind of face do you think I am making under the mask? Almost like a peek a boo game, lifting the mask to show the facial expression with a tone to match the expression. Be sure to use expressive eyes as well. Model how to take on, take off, and place in individual designated areas when not in use so the children understand where the masks need to be kept when not in use.
- Before giving the children the masks, have a morning meeting on age level to introduce the masks. Go over guidelines in a way they will understand. Invite each individual child to come up to receive a mask.
- Write their first and last name on it with a permanent marker. Ask the child to hold the mask so they can see and feel it and ask them if they would like to wear it. Have the child look into a mirror (preferably one on a stand that is not hand held). Have them talk about their thoughts while looking at themselves wearing the masks.
- Be respectful and ask if you can place it on their face, all the while self-talking so that you are explaining as you go ("Okay, I'm going to put this over your face, now I am going to tie the string in the back"...) so they can anticipate and understand what is happening, as they watch you placing it on them. If they get frightened or scared or express refusal, tell them it is okay and you can try again later if they want, when they are ready.
- Have frequent conversations and check ins with the children until they are comfortable with mask use.

INCORPORATING MASKS INTO THE CURRICULUM:

- Have pictures of real children wearing real masks. Help them understand that the mask is to help keep them safe and keep away from germs and not to promote superhero play.
- Read a social story about masks, and then create one with your children. Collaborate with preschoolers and record their words; individual for school age. Invite them to write and illustrate.
- Add homemade masks from scraps of fabric or material or paper available to dramatic play area for baby dolls to wear. Ask the children if they would like to decorate the masks for their doll. Role play with the children so they can explain to the babies how the masks are helpful. Consider creating a doctor's office or veterinarian's office. Be sure the materials you are adding can be sanitized or machine washed at the end of the day.

THE ISSUE OF CHILDREN REMOVING MASKS:

- We have to be vigilant in observing the younger children for signs that they want to remove the mask to avoid them taking it off on their own and dropping it on a surface or on the floor, where another child could have access to it.

BEHAVIOR CHALLENGES:

- Encourage the children to talk about how they are feeling wearing the mask throughout the day and allow them to remove it if it is bothering them.
- If a child continues to take it on and off, simply remove it with protocol and ask the child if they would like to wear it again at a later time.
- Be mindful of your children who are sensory sensitive or struggle with change. Be patient and responsive to their needs.

MOISTURE BUILDUP:

- Use your Daily Health Checklists to document rash checks throughout the day, with gloved hands. Consider incorporating rash checks with your diaper and bathroom schedule and during meal times.
- Any signs or symptoms of a rash should be documented and parents should be notified according to your protocol.
- The mask should be removed with gloved hands and placed into the child's "Dirty" Container. The skin should be washed with soap and water and patted dry. Allow the skin to air dry. Follow your protocol for caring for rashes.

LACK OF BODY LANGUAGE:

- Children rely on our body language and expressive tones to decode adult messages.
- While wearing masks, they will not be able to see your facial expressions so eye contact and tone is especially important.
- It will also be important to speak slowly and clearly so that the children can understand what we are communicating to them without the visual of reading lips and facial expressions.
- Adults may have more difficulty hearing or understanding what a child is trying to communicate because they are wearing a mask.
- To avoid frustration, you can remove the mask with gloved hands and ask the child to repeat. Then remove gloves and wash your hands.

STORAGE:

- Have three small, Ziplock baggies available for each child—either program or parent supplied.
- Label all Ziplocks with the child's first and last name.
- Label one "Clean", one "Dirty" and one "In use". You may want to consider this for staff as well.
- Ziplocks out of the reach of children (diaper bins, high shelf, closet, etc.). You can do this with individual bins for each child or have a bin for community containers one "Clean", one "Dirty", One "In use" (Nap time, Meal Time, etc.).
- Do the same for your extra mask supply, labeling "Extra".
- Use a permanent marker to label any extra mask that needs to be used with the child's first and last name. That mask will remain with that child and should not be returned to the extra supply.
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STORAGE WHEN MASK IS CONTAMINATED:

- Follow your same protocol for soiled clothes and universal precautions.
- Clean and disinfect area where mask was placed
- Have children wash their hands.
- Anytime Ziplocks are touched with dirty gloves, they should be sanitized.
- When finished, remove gloves carefully and wash hands using hand washing procedures.
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STORAGE FOR CLEAN MASKS WHEN NOT IN USE:

- Have staff hold open the "In Use" Ziplock bag with gloved hands. Have the child remove their mask and place it inside their "In Use" Ziplock.
- Have child wash their hands. Zip the Ziplock closed as you supervise handwashing. Repeat when the child needs to retrieve their "In use" mask. Be sure to wash your own hands after removing gloves.