



Department of Health

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Dear Colleagues:

At this stage in the pandemic, the effectiveness of masks and face coverings in preventing the spread of COVID-19 infections is undisputed among global public health organizations regardless of the reasons individuals cite for not wearing them. It's not just the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization that endorse the use of face coverings for children 2 years of age and older; the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) strongly supports cloth face coverings for this age group as evidence continues to increase that they can provide similar infection control to surgical face masks.

Clinicians can urge parents, teachers, and caregivers to discuss and model the use of face coverings with children so they become accustomed to their use, as well as discuss other infection-control measures such as handwashing and how to maintain physical distancing. Services and opportunities provided through 504 plans and individualized education programs (IEPs) should be complemented with mask education and hand hygiene as part of a comprehensive curriculum.

At their Healthy Children website for parent education, the American Academy of Pediatrics also provides guidance on [mask-wearing](#) and [children with special healthcare needs](#) that pediatricians can share with parents. Considerations include helping individuals with IDD learn not to touch their faces whether they are wearing a mask or not, helping them with safely donning and removing masks at mealtimes, getting the mask fit right for children with craniofacial conditions, the use face coverings with transparent windows for children who rely on lip reading, and addressing conditions that may require N95 respirators and eye protection. For children with behavioral disabilities, the links provide parents with information on using social stories to help children become familiar with masks and tips like putting a face covering on a favorite stuffed animal or drawing one on a favorite picture-book character.

I encourage pediatric and primary care providers to reach out to regional pediatric specialists and the state's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). New York State's three UCEDD centers in [Rochester](#), [Westchester](#), and [New York City](#) can help address the COVID-related exacerbation of the significant health disparities that already exist for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

One Last Thing: Following the success of last year's PrEP Aware Week, the AIDS Institute is sponsoring a virtual [PrEP Aware Week](#) on October 25-31. PrEP is a

way for those who do not have HIV but who are at substantial risk of getting it to prevent HIV infection by taking medication in a manner that is tailored to their specific prevention needs. New York State [clinical guidelines for PrEP](#) have been updated and emphasize using a flexible, individualized approach to meeting the HIV prevention and sexual health needs of sexually active adults. As New Yorkers continue to observe social distancing, it is good clinical practice for healthcare providers to discuss sexual health and prescribe PrEP as a first-line intervention to prevent HIV and promote sexual health. PrEP Aware Week will launch a PrEP social media campaign featuring a diverse panel of eight community ambassadors from around the state. Their messages will help all New Yorkers understand that PrEP is effective, affordable, and that most individuals will have few or no side effects. You can find the social media campaign materials at www.prepforsex.org.

Every month in these communications, I think of how much the role of healthcare provider has grown in the eyes of the public and in the stature of our nation during this pandemic. Your integrity and courage continually reassure residents who fear that belief in magical thinking may undermine the scientific foundation of public health. I know your commitment to the health and wellbeing of your patients will carry New York State through whatever this pandemic may have in store for us. Thank you for being there for New York State and for all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,



Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.