

Dear School Board,

Thank you so much for your time to hear out my concerns. My name is Jo Koo. I am a board-certified emergency medicine physician and practice locally here at Winona Health, since 2013. After having discussions with Henry, he was able to get me a study used to support the masking position. Basically, we are at a point in this pandemic, as a parent I need to understand the WHY behind the policies.

First, we need to break down scientific study designs. Observational studies are retrospective, and mechanistic studies are laboratory. Randomized control trials – which are the gold standard of evidence – are the ONLY statistical method known that can establish cause and effect.

From the North Carolina Department of Health, the study shows many cited sources to help make their decisions. The first one was from Chu et al (Lancet 2020). Think of the Lancet like the New England Journal of Medicine out of Europe. It's very prestigious and highly regarded. That review group went through 172 studies, with only 2 being from 2020 from the U.S. Many of the studies were from the time of Swine flu (H1N1), SARS (the first covid), MERS, and other respiratory viruses such as other types of corona virus, RSV, and influenza. Outside of the 2, these studies were done as early as 2008, 2010, 2012 and definitely long before COVID19.

A second provided study was from the International Journal of Nursing by McIntyre et al (2020). It was a reviewed randomized control trial from again, previous studies. This one also reviewed and suggested masking symptomatic (sick) people.

Yet another study talks about no superiority between N95 or surgical masks. These are from previous studies from viral illness such as influenza. This study had a more clinical setting – meaning tested in real life, while a laboratory study showed how far and much aerosol travels from your mouth. Just this last week the University of Waterloo released a laboratory study. They suggest that if a mask be worn, that it would be a well fitted N95 or KN95 along with improved ventilation efforts because surgical and cloths mask were found only 10% effective. However, this was not concluded from clinical testing – it was mechanistic. The study does make the point that in order to have any benefit from masks, they must be fitted properly. Interestingly enough, both masked groups (surgical and N95) got sick with viral illness.

Here is WHY I am not for mandating masks for anyone, but especially children.

First, I don't know one child, much less an adult, who actually wears a well-fitted mask. Secondly, it looks nice to see current citations dated 2020. However, I am concerned that all these studies are based from reviewing previous studies from up to 12 years ago and before COVID 19. Before COVID-19, there were no mandates. Even though children were dying and schools were seeing huge outbreaks, these recommendations were provided but no mandates were suggested, much less executed. Even now the CDC lists masks as a recommendation.

So, a counter argument is that this is a novel virus (which it is), but we also have novel influenza viruses every year too. Some mention this is different because we've never had a pandemic. Well, what about the studies discussed from the New York Times from Wisconsin, Utah, and Missouri where those states had schools open but all the children masked? Even with high community case counts, no significant issues occurred. Last year, masking children allowed people to consider opening schools. However, there was no control group to do any type of randomized control trial. This means no cause and effect of

wearing a mask can be established, which then means that this cycle can go on and on and on. (The thought that, “we didn’t see any harm masking kids this past year so we will continue to do it again next year and then years after that”.) I have seen many mechanistic and observational studies get demolished even with 1 randomized control trial (RCT). So, with one of these trials, it would trump any of the evidence or studies that have been provided as arguments for masks to me from the school. And even the studies provided recommend RCT to further compare, within the limitations of the studies.

In the past 18 months, according to the Minnesota department of health, 3 children under 9 died from COVID19. Previous years (2009-2019) when it was recommended for masking, children died of influenza every year. 2014-15 was the worst at 10 and lowest was 2 years old (2013-14, 2016-2017, 2018-2019). School reported outbreaks from influenza, previous to Covid19 were at the highest 706 schools (2014-2015) and lowest 93 (2013-2014).

Current testing of actual conditions is not happening. Here’s what we don’t know the answer to: the assumption is if the children and teachers at schools that have started and shut down would have been wearing masks, the spread wouldn’t have happened. However, there are no studies (RCT) for cause and effect. There’s no current scientific study to prove that the outbreaks were in direct correlation to masks – worn or not worn. There’s no study for variables like children going to school unmasked, the rates of transmission within age groups, gender, child to adult, etc etc. This would be the control group and needs to be compared with a masked group.

The idea that we can stop this disease is unrealistic. People talk about polio or smallpox but those are not respiratory viruses. How many respiratory viruses have ever been eradicated? None. And Covid-19 isn’t going anywhere. We will be navigating and living with this virus for the rest of our lives. If you are going to be helpful and not spread the disease, there’s an interesting read from the school’s sources from China that shows masking within the family will slow spreading – however, please note that the most spreading was between spouse’s vs between an adult and child.

Bottom line, I would love to speak with any of you who have questions. I would love to dialogue about all the complex layers of navigating respiratory viruses and provide other approaches or idea than those of the popular, mass movement. I encourage you to read your support literature – I have. Ultimately, you’re making your decision based on what you believe to be true - information you think is accurate and trusted. It’s just when I personally followed the rabbit trail, I came up wanting and less confident than ever that we should be mandating a masking recommendation. Personally, I don’t want my children in masks because I see no irrefutable scientific proof that suggests we can stop this pandemic by masking healthy children.