

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 22, 2021

Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPH
Director
Center for Disease Control and Prevention
395 E St. SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Director Walensky,

We write to request that you provide us with information on how the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) came to its conclusion that children two years and older should wear face masks to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.¹ The CDC first put this recommendation forward in March 2020 and since then, many states and localities have based their mask mandate age requirements on it. Additionally, President Biden's January 21, 2021 Executive Order required that all airports, commercial aircrafts, trains, intercity bus services, and other forms of public transportation comply with the CDC's guidelines on mask wearing and the CDC subsequently put forward a corresponding mandate that only exempted children under the age of two years.^{2,3}

The implementation of these recommendations has had serious consequences for some Americans. Multiple parents of young children have been removed from flights, and in some instances, permanently banned, from future travel on the airline they were flying due to their toddler's refusal to wear a mask.⁴ These unfortunate events have occurred despite the parents' best attempts to have their child cooperate with the mask requirement, which is a struggle millions of parents have faced this past year. For parents of children with disabilities, compliance has proved almost impossible, resulting in increased social isolation and negative mental health consequences.

The CDC's mandate that children as young as 2-years-old must wear facemasks is among the most stringent face mask age requirements in the world. For example, in Switzerland, children

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/protect-children.html>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/21/executive-order-promoting-covid-19-safety-in-domestic-and-international-travel/>

³ https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/pdf/Mask-Order-CDC_GMTF_01-29-21-p.pdf

⁴ See for example, <https://abcnews.com/Politics/airlines-scrutiny-mask-policies-parents-toddlers-kicked-off/story?id=73204508>; <https://simpleflying.com/parents-of-maskless-2-year-old-thrown-off-united-flight-fly-delta/>; <https://thefederalist.com/2021/03/01/frontier-airlines-under-fire-after-booting-18-month-old-jewish-baby-off-flight-for-not-wearing-a-mask/>; <https://www.outkick.com/spirit-mask-autistic/>; and <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/mom-6-kicked-flight-children-after-2-year-old-would-n1237471>

under the age of 12 do not have to wear a mask.⁵ In the UK and France, children under the age of 11 are exempt.^{6,7} And in Italy, the exemption applies to children under the age of six.⁸ The significantly lower age requirement for mask wearing in the United States raises questions about the susceptibility of young children to COVID-19, the rate at which they transmit the disease, and their developmental ability to comply with mask requirements.

Within the United States, children younger than age five account for approximately six percent of the population but only two percent of total coronavirus cases.⁹ Further, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges, “Several studies have found that children transmit the virus, but perhaps not as often as adults, especially in younger age groups.”¹⁰ National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci made a similar assessment in November 2020, stating, “If you look at the data, the spread among children and from children is not really very big at all, not like one would have suspected.”¹¹

One review of scientific literature on COVID-19 infections showed “evidence for significantly lower susceptibility to infection for children aged under 10 years compared to adults given the same exposure.”¹² Another review that focused on contact-tracing studies and population-screening studies found “preliminary evidence that children and young people have lower susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2, with a 56% lower odds of being an infected contact.”¹³ A different analysis of 32 studies indicated that “children and adolescents younger than 20 years had 44% lower odds of secondary infection with SARS-CoV-2 compared with adults 20 years and older; this finding was most marked in those younger than 10 to 14 years.”¹⁴

Given evidence indicating the lower likelihood of young children to contract and spread COVID-19 as well as the significant, negative impact of the CDC’s mask guidelines on the lives of Americans with young children, we request that you respond to the following questions:

- Why did the CDC set the minimum age requirement for COVID-19 mask guidelines at two-years-old?
- What specific scientific studies did the CDC base its recommendations on?
- What childhood developmental milestones did the CDC take into consideration when setting the minimum age requirement at two-years-old?

⁵ <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov/masken.html>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

⁷ <https://www.thelocal.fr/20200713/latest-are-masks-about-to-become-compulsory-in-france/>

⁸ <http://www.italia.it/en/useful-info/covid-19-updates-information-for-tourists.html>

⁹ <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#demographics>

¹⁰ <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/kids-school-and-covid-19-what-we-know-and-what-we-don-t>

¹¹ ABC News Politics, Twitter. (November 29, 2020). (Accessed February 18, 2021).

<https://twitter.com/ABCPolitics/status/1333059043452211206?s=20>

¹² <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.07.19.20157362v2>

¹³ <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.20.20108126v1>

¹⁴ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2771181>

- What steps is the CDC taking to track the latest scientific studies on the contraction and transmission of COVID-19 among children and the effectiveness of masks in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 by children?
- What plans does the CDC have in place to update its recommendations on mask wearing as new information is gained from these scientific studies about the contraction and spread of COVID-19 by children, especially young children?
- Are you continuing to monitor the science that informs your administration's guidance on children wearing masks? Are you willing to modify and update your current guidance?

We look forward to receiving your response by May 6, 2021.

Sincerely,



Michael S. Lee
United States Senator



Jason Smith
United States Representative



Rand Paul
United States Senator



Daniel Webster
United States Representative



Mike Braun
United States Senator



Marjorie Taylor Greene
United States Representative



James Lankford
United States Senator



Eric A. "Rick" Crawford
United States Representative



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Jody Hice
United States Representative



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Doug LaMalfa
United States Representative



Scott Perry
United States Representative



Tom McClintock
United States Representative



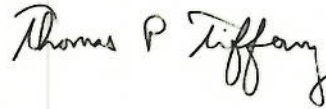
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Andy Biggs
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Ronny L. Jackson, M.D.
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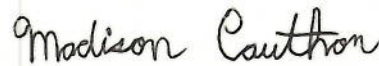
Bob Good
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Russ Fulcher
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Bill Posey
United States Representative



Madison Cawthorn
United States Representative



Ken Calvert
United States Representative



Yvette Harrel
United States Representative

CC: Secretary of HHS, Xavier Becerra