

Putting face masks on infants, toddlers, and children to protect against COVID-19: Under 2 years of age

There have been recent reports from communities across British Columbia of caregivers using adult face masks, home-made masks, plastic coverings, blankets, or a combination of items to protect their baby, toddler, or child.

Although infants and children can become ill with COVID-19, their infection rate is very low when compared to the adult population. The COVID-19 infection rate in children has been estimated at 1-5% worldwide, with most typically developing milder symptoms, if any. Severe illness in young children infected by COVID-19 also appears to be less common than in adults. Due to these factors, extreme precautions are not warranted and may in fact raise the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and/or suffocation. Therefore, infants/children under the age of 2 years should not wear a mask and do not need visors or eye protection. Nor should they be over bundled as this too raises the risk of SIDS.

KEY MESSAGE:

Masks or face coverings, visors or eye protection **are not made to** be used on infants/children under the age of 2 years

- Masks make breathing more difficult for children under 2 years of age due to their smaller airways, which could lead to suffocation. In addition, the masks may have small parts that can come off and become a choking hazard.
- Child-size masks can be used on children over the age of 2 years who are able to understand to keep the mask on, do not have difficulty breathing, and are able to remove the mask themselves when needed. Use of masks in the hospital setting should be followed as per site policy or medical recommendations.

The best way to protect infants/children under 2 years of age from COVID-19 infection:

- Frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is a safe and effective method for hand hygiene in the community and for all age groups.
- Physical distancing for the caregiver and infant/child from other individuals outside of the immediate household, should be reinforced as the best way to protect against COVID-19.
- If soap and water are not available, most liquid hand sanitizers (containing minimum 60% alcohol) can be used instead by adults and children, as per manufacturer instructions.
 - **Hand sanitizer should not be used on preterm or newborn infants** due to the continued developmental changes of the skin.
 - Supervision **must be** provided to children younger than six years of age when using hand sanitizers, and mainly before the liquid hand sanitizer has dried, as studies have shown that even small amounts of the ingested liquid can lead to alcohol poisoning.

For a young child, caregiver should squirt a small amount of hand sanitizer into their own hands and then rub the child's hands until fully dry.

- All hand sanitizer should be kept away from the reach of infants/children.

Suggestions on how to keep the infant/child safe when taken out into the public:

- Cover the infant/child carrier with a light blanket or breathable cover, instead of the infant/child directly. This will create a protective barrier while allowing infant/child to breathe comfortably.
- The infant/child should be frequently monitored while the blanket is covering the carrier to ensure safety and that they are not overheating.
- The blanket should be removed when not in a public place or when the parent or guardian has no direct view of the infant/child.

References:

BC Centre for Disease Control. (2020). *Caring for children with COVID-19: April 3, 2020*. Bccdc.ca. Retrieved 27 April, 2020, from: <http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/Caring-for-children.pdf>

Canadian Pediatric Society. (2020). *Current epidemiology and guidance for COVID-19 caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus, in children: March 2020 | Canadian Paediatric Society*. Cps.ca. Retrieved 14 April 2020, from <https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/current-epidemiology-and-guidance-for-covid-19-march-2020>.

Edwards, M.S., Kaplan, S.L., & Torchia, M.M. (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID_19): Consideration in children. UpToDate.com. Retrieved April 30, 2020 from: https://www.uptodate.com/contents/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-considerations-in-children?sectionName=Hand%20sanitizer%20safety&topicRef=6486&anchor=H1301342975&source=see_link#H1301342975

HealthLink BC. (2017). *Hand Washing: Help Stop the Spread of Germs*. Healthlinkbc.ca. Retrieved 28 April, 2020 from: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/hand-washing>

Ness, M.J., Davis, M.R., & William, A.C. (2013). Neonatal skin care: A concise review. *International Journal of Dermatology*, 52(1), 14-22.

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2020). *About non-medical masks and face coverings - Canada.ca*. Canada.ca. Retrieved 17 April 2020, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/instructions-sew-no-sew-cloth-face-covering.html>.

Santos, C., Kieszak, S., Wang, A., Law, R., Schier, J., & Wolkin, A. (2017). *Reported adverse health effects in children from ingestion of alcohol-based hand sanitizers—United States, 2011–2014*. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 66(8), 223–226. Retrieved 28 April, 2020 from: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6608a5.htm>