

# Masks and Child Well Being: Areas of Potential Concern

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- ▶ Language Development
- ▶ Reading Emotional Cues / Social Interaction
- ▶ Mental Health

# Language Development

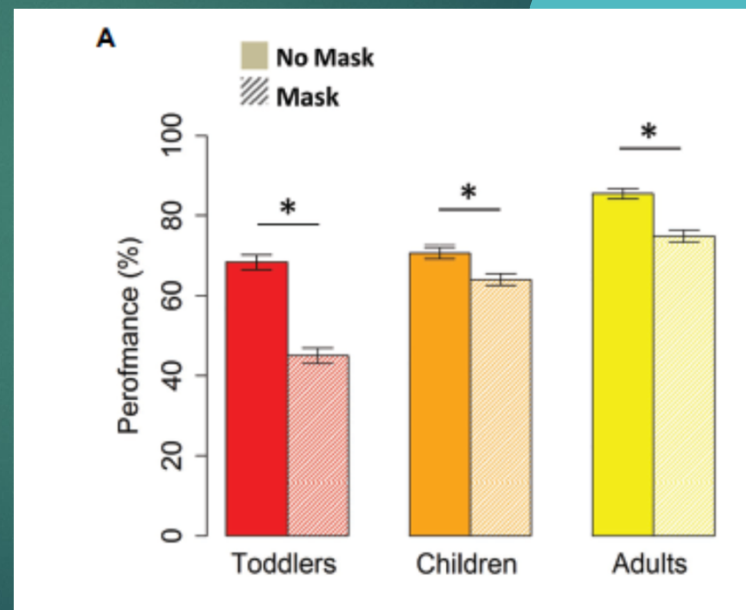


- ▶ Toddlers can understand words through an opaque mask (Singh et al., 2021)
- ▶ No research evidence of adverse effects of masks specifically on language development at this time
- ▶ Expert thinking varies – many note challenges for specific populations who rely on visual cues (e.g. those with reading disabilities, receptive-expressive language disorders, English language learners) and children with speech impediments.
  - ▶ No evidence of whether there are long term impacts for these populations
  - ▶ Other experts believe that pandemic-related stressors like disrupted services and changes in home language environment are the main reasons for observed language difficulties

# Reading Emotion Cues: Experimental Studies

- ▶ Ruba & Pollak, 2020 – School Age kids show minimal impediment from masks in reading emotion
- ▶ Gori et al. 2021 – maybe more difficulty for preschoolers
- ▶ Schneider et al. – preschoolers can read emotions through masks fine (67% accuracy w/ masks vs. 71% accuracy w/out masks)
- ▶ Tronick & Snidman – “Mask wearing is not interrupting early emotional connection”

Gori et al., 2021



# Mental Health

- ▶ Definitely there's a pediatric mental health crisis
- ▶ No empirical evidence that it's due to masks
- ▶ Around the U. S. & around the world, the rise in frequency & severity of pediatric mental health diagnoses is not related to whether there are school mask mandates or not - masks do not explain this crisis.
- ▶ These factors ARE implicated in pediatric mental health during the pandemic:
  - ▶ Reduced access to mental & physical health care
  - ▶ Increased parental stress & poorer parent mental health
  - ▶ Social isolation / quarantine
  - ▶ Reduced exercise
  - ▶ Sleep disruption