

Letter to the Editor

Face mask and affective development in children: time to ponder and sort issues afore it's too late

Sir,

Wearing face mask can cut down the odds of infections entering sound individual as respiratory droplets/ aerosols while additionally lessening danger of ejection from contaminated individual. Respiratory transmission of CORONA VIRUS by means of droplets or aerosols can be forestalled by the suitable utilization of face mask.¹ Since COVID-19 contamination has arisen as pandemic, entire world is bound to follow the COVID-appropriate behaviours. Among all actions to battle COVID contamination, most talked about and investigated is utilization of face mask. Utilization of face mask by grown-ups are likewise problematic, then, at that point, considering their utilization in kids are genuinely quite difficult. Many research studies have attempted to discover the relationship of mask and actual uneasiness or respiratory long-haul issues, however veils innocuously relating to these boundaries.² This letter is to stress the use of mask with an affective domain of development of children. Development of children is partitioned into language, cognitive, affective and psychomotor development. Affective development is defined as ability to perceive and respond/ react to assortment of emotions from others. This emotional capacity emergence starts with infancy itself and progresses to evolve during various phases of life principally in adolescence period corresponding to environmental surroundings of

individual.³ Most emotional growth and development occur with getting clues or signs from others' facial expressions and emotional clues. In infancy, the biggest influencers are parents, family members, and caretakers, whereas, in childhood, school teachers and schoolmates are also on list. Considering pandemic situation, where everyone is using face masks at schools, kindergarten, or during interacting and communicating with others. WHO and UNICEF have recommended the use of face masks to all children above 5 years of age group.⁴ Mask is also masking and veiling emotional clues and facial expressions when an adult with a mask communicates to an infant/ child regardless of the child's face mask. They are also not exposed to model behaviours from parents during their interaction with others in presence of children. Present circumstance isn't irksome on off chance that it is for brief length however here, we have as of now finished 2 years into pandemic. This compromise in affective development is alarm of future increase in neuro-developmental problems affecting social communication and behaviour like Autism/ Asperger's syndrome etc. This is time to act for overcoming these challenges and sensitize all so that we can forestall/ prevent vulnerable generation, infants, toddlers, children from long-term psychological effect of pandemic (Table 1). Transparent face masks/ shields may serve as solution to nonverbal communication, empathy/ emotions, which is hindered by regular surgical masks or N95 masks.⁵

Table 1: Challenges and measures to overcome affective development in different age groups in children.

Age period	Stages of affective growth	Pandemic Challenges	Measures
Infancy	Children learn to receive emotional clues or respond to them	All caretakers wearing a face mask when they are with kids as prudent measures	Parents can play a crucial role by devoting an undistracted face-to-face interaction/ eye to eye communication time at home.
Toddlers	Emotional jargon/ vocabulary begins to develop. They learn to differentiate between various emotions, feelings and begin to form a sensation of empathy	Their companions or caretakers are all in face masks and following physical distancing where applicable	Transparent face shields or face masks can be an answer or solution in addition to other COVID appropriate practices.
Childhood	They learn from individuals around them and attempt to react and respond in matching ways with the goal that they ought to be socially adequate. Children additionally figure out how to adapt to issues by showing suitable emotions.	Schools are either closed or running in hybrid modes. Children who are attending schools are also surrounded by people with a face mask so maybe having hindrance to learn affective development	School classrooms should be well ventilated and social distancing should be followed. Teachers and caretakers can use transparent face shield or face mask or transparent barrier can be placed. All school staff should be immunized. Few fundamental abilities/ life skills classes can be introduced in curriculum/ educational program where educational videos or stories can show to kids to learn socially acceptable emotional expressions.

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