

2/8/2022

To whom it may concern,

I am writing you today as an advocate for my children. I lost a child and have experienced the relentless pain that goes along with burying someone you love deeply and for whom you have hopes and dreams. It is a pain that no parent should have to endure. I have always believed my job as a parent is to keep my children safe, and I have been doing my best to do it throughout the pandemic. This year I have two children in the public school system. One is a kindergartener, and the other is in public preschool in Oxford, CT. With Omicron, I did not feel schools were adequately safe, and I removed my children from public school. It was a tough decision to make, as I value public education, and I have a child receiving special education services. They stayed out for one month, while I closely monitored the COVID data available to me through the district website and positivity, hospitalization, and mortality rates. We returned them to public school at the end of January. I believe we need to continue to follow science, as the pandemic is not over.

A first-of-its-kind study of child masking was published in "JAMA Network Open," a peer-reviewed journal of the American Medical Association. It studied data from all 50 states and was aimed at informing policies regarding the health and wellbeing of children. It found that programs that practiced masking had a 13-14% reduction of program closures. "We have been seeing increased numbers of children, especially young children not yet able to be vaccinated against COVID-19, admitted to our children's hospital," said Thomas Murray, associate medical director for infection prevention at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital and the study's lead author. "It is heartening to know that following child masking recommendations for children two years and older may be an effective means for keeping young children in childcare programs and potentially lowering their risk for COVID-19."

As a parent with a 3-year-old in the public school, I feel like he is invisible and forgotten as policies are being made. He is unable to be vaccinated at this time. Should the vaccine be approved at the end of the month, parents will be faced with the choice to vaccinate their children knowing that this vaccine was not effective enough to initially go to EUA authorization. The hope would be that it may lead to a reduction of death and serious illness, but even that is uncertain. We all know that masks are most effective when everyone in the room is wearing one. And we know that if the mask mandate ends, it will be up to individual towns to make the decision to enforce mask use. It will create disparate situations across the state as different towns have different policies.

We all would love for this pandemic to be over, but unfortunately, we know it is not. "We are going to continue to see additional deaths this year," Dr. Ulysses Wu, the chief epidemiologist of Hartford HealthCare, said. "Our job is to reiterate that this is a preventable disease." Over 10000 people in the state of CT have died with Covid so far. Masks are one of the only mitigation factors in place in my son's preschool classroom. There is no distancing as all the children sit at one table. The only filtration is the one I, as a parent, bought for the classroom. There is no vaccination available for my child. The only thing protecting him is the fact that there is a mask mandate. Please, do not let our youngest children be the invisible collateral damage, and vectors which bring disease back to the community. We know that in our town, there has been in-school transmission. Please, extend the mask mandate. Do what is right for our children and our communities.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I hope you will do the right thing. Masking is the best policy we could have in place in schools, while this pandemic is still a threat to us all.

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