

Keeping Kids Fully Masked Until Fully Vaccinated

by Libby Allison
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As communities reopen, and masking mandates are lifted for the vaccinated population, experts warn: those who are not fully vaccinated need to continue to follow basic COVID-19 prevention measures, including kids.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released a report, citing that the number of adolescents who were hospitalized with COVID-19 increased in March and April.

The CDC maintains that this increase highlights the need to continue COVID-19 prevention measures, including vaccinations, masking and distancing. Lori Grooms, director of infection prevention for OSF HealthCare agrees, and says parents need to be advocates for their kids.

“There is so much we don’t know about COVID and the long term effects,” says Grooms. “There have been studies that have shown complications with the heart, complications with the lungs that are long term. A young adult, you really don’t want to put them in that situation where they are going to have more complications, especially if they’re long term complications.”

According to the CDC findings, of the adolescents hospitalized for COVID-19 from January through March of this year, nearly one-third were admitted to an ICU.

Grooms says parents should make sure their teens understand the importance of receiving the COVID-19 vaccination, and continued masking if they’re not vaccinated.

“My advice is to openly talk about vaccination, to help remove the fear of vaccination, and to encourage teenagers to get vaccinated and really to make them understand the importance of wearing that mask still,” suggests Grooms. “Even if they have gotten that shot we need to make sure they’re wearing their mask for at least another two weeks after that last dose of vaccination.”

Encouraging kids to keep masks on, while much of the population – and likely many of their friends – no longer wears one can be tricky. Groom suggests having a conversation about why we wear masks, versus simply giving the directive.

“Engage your child in an open conversation and you have to really stress the importance of why we mask – it’s not just for me but it’s for you. So getting them to understand that I mask because I want to protect myself but I also want to protect my friends,” she says.

Currently, anyone 12 and older is eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, and can self-schedule at osfhealthcare.org/vaccine.

Grooms and others urge everyone to continue following public health guidelines to slow the spread of COVID-19 whether or not you have received a vaccine by diligently practicing sensible day-to-day habits. The best form of prevention is to avoid exposure to the virus.