



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health
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RICHMOND, VA 23218

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Acting State Health Commissioner

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January 21, 2022

ACTING STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER ORDER RESCINDING ORDER OF PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY TEN (2021) IMPOSING STATEWIDE REQUIREMENT TO WEAR MASKS IN K-12 SCHOOLS

WHEREAS there is no greater priority than the health and welfare of Virginia's children, and parents have the fundamental right to make decisions concerning the care of their children;

WHEREAS children are at very low risk of severe illness due to COVID-19;

WHEREAS children aged five and older are now eligible to obtain COVID-19 vaccines;

WHEREAS universal masking of children may be rendered ineffective because many children use cloth masks that become dirty and are poor fitting, they wear masks incorrectly, and younger children may have increased difficulty with proper or sustained mask wearing;

WHEREAS masking of school-aged children can interfere with communication, learning, and the development of language, emotional and social skills; masking can increase feelings of isolation and lead to anxiety and exacerbation of mental health issues; and masking may lead to difficulty breathing and discomfort due to mask wearing;

WHEREAS during the recent Omicron outbreak, locations with restrictive masking policies have similar or greater rates of transmission as those with less restrictive mask policies;

WHEREAS there is a lack of consensus among health authorities regarding the costs and benefits of mask-wearing for children in school;

WHEREAS there are multiple strategies that can be implemented to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in schools; and

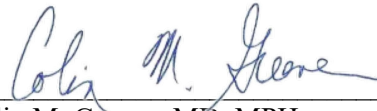
WHEREAS the benefit of mitigation efforts must always be weighed against the cost to children's overall physical, mental, emotional, and academic well-being;

NOW THEREFORE, the Acting State Health Commissioner, pursuant to §§ 32.1-13 and 32.1-20 of the *Code of Virginia*, hereby rescinds Order of Public Health Emergency Ten (2021). Mitigation efforts in schools should be made in consultation with the Virginia Department of Health and local health authorities.

Effective Date of this Order

This Order and the rescinding of Order of Public Health Emergency Ten (2021) shall be effective at 12:00 a.m. on Monday, January 24, 2022.

Given under my hand and under the Seal of the Office of the State Health Commissioner of the Commonwealth of Virginia this 21st day of January 2022.



Colin M. Greene, MD, MPH
Acting State Health Commissioner