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GP CME SOUTH

### 'Masking schoolkids not the answer'

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Friday 2 September 2022, 09:00 AM  
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We've still got people crying from the rooftops saying it's a national disgrace

Universal mask-wearing at schools does not protect communities, says University of Otago academic Peter McIntyre (image: Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash)

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No amount of mask-wearing at schools or booster vaccinations for children will protect adults from COVID-19, says Peter McIntyre, a University of Otago academic and member of WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation.

The purpose of vaccinating children against the virus, particularly those with existing health problems, is to protect them from "a very much lower, but still present, risk of severe disease", says Professor McIntyre.

A paediatric infectious diseases specialist and professor in the Department of Women's and Children's Health, he spoke to *New Zealand Doctor Rata Aotearoa* at the South GP CME conference in Christchurch earlier this month.

He points out vaccinating children to stop COVID-19 spreading through the community "doesn't work".

"[We're] fooling ourselves [if we think] by having universal mask wearing and high COVID boosters for children that we are going to protect adults," Professor McIntyre says.

"But we've still got people crying from the rooftops saying it's a national disgrace that we don't have compulsory mask-wearing in schools."



#### How to Treat: Anorexia nervosa in young people

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of eating disorders, particularly anorexia nervosa, have dramatically increased both in New Zealand and overseas. Young people with anorexia are most likely to present to primary care services. In this article, **Hiran Thabrew** offers new ideas for supporting this group of young people during the COVID-19 era ... [Read more](#)

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"But we've still got people crying from the rooftops saying it's a national disgrace that we don't have compulsory mask-wearing in schools."

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Speaking to a GP CME conference audience in response to a question about mask fatigue, he said a risk-based approach was needed. It was good to continue with mask-wearing in public spaces, like healthcare facilities and supermarkets, he said.

Immunisation Advisory Centre director, University of Auckland professor and specialist GP Nikki Turner agreed.

After this winter, New Zealand needs to look at a more pragmatic, long-term model for mask-wearing in enclosed spaces when respiratory viruses are circulating, Professor Turner says.

"Like a general practice waiting room with frail, elderly people sitting next to others [without masks] is not acceptable," she says. "That's long-term."

New Zealand should not follow the UK in getting rid of mask-wearing "lock, stock and barrel" because people were fed up: "We've got to find something that is pragmatic, that our community can tolerate and [that is] sensible."

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