

Oh, That's What You Look Like!

Is it time to take off our facemasks?

by Erica Berg, MD



We are coming to the end of a wave. Hallelujah! More than 253 million Americans have gotten at least one dose of *COVID-19* vaccine, and the *Omicron* variant is fading. A lot is changing, and today looks very different than March of 2020. How much risk of *COVID-19* is there in our area now? Parents see that states around the country have dropped facemask mandates, but also see that *COVID-19* continues to claim hundreds of lives each day. So many have been asking Clarkstown Pediatrics for guidance.

Figuring out risk vs benefit of removing masks involves more than just looking at a few numbers: **What is the *COVID-19* risk in your community?** **Does your family have someone with any health conditions?** **How often do you go to riskier areas?** **What was your personal experience with loss during the pandemic?** (Maybe if you lost someone close to you from *COVID-19*, you're just not ready. Maybe the risk of missing work because of a school exposure is too high for some parents.)

So even though rates of *COVID-19* infections, hospitalizations, and school outbreaks should be followed closely, your family may have reasons to keep masking. Let's hope *COVID-19* rates stay low!

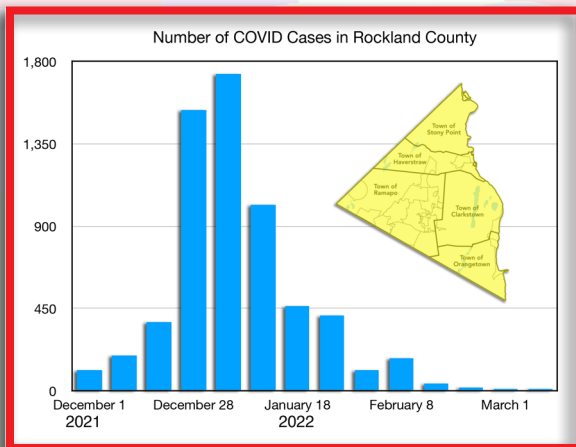
Our CDC has changed guidance again because infection rates have dropped. While removing masks in schools now is a welcome change, we as a community can continue to use the layered approach: spacing, ventilation, vaccination and other measures that have helped during the past two years.

Children under 5 cannot yet be vaccinated, and kids under 2 are mostly unable to wear masks themselves. So parents must rely on community protection to keep them safe from *COVID-19*.

While masking requirements will be removed in some places, that doesn't mean you or your child can't continue to wear a mask. Yes, masks are most effective when everyone is wearing them. but the highest quality masks (*N95*, *KN95*, *KF94*) offer protection even if others aren't wearing masks.

If your whole family is at low risk for complications from *COVID-19*, now may be the time to consider unmasking. There is a beautiful glow to seeing our children's smiles again in the classroom and being able to engage with their peers and teachers without masks! If rates go back up, facemasks should go back on.

We at Clarkstown Pediatrics feel strongly in our recommendation to vaccinate (see our video on the homepage of our website). It is riskier to remove your facemask if you are unvaccinated! As always, please reach out with any further questions.



Consider what's right
for your family!