

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Lifting Universal Masking in Schools — Covid-19 Incidence among Students and Staff

Cowger TL et al. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa2211029

CLINICAL PROBLEM

Massachusetts rescinded its statewide school masking policy on February 28, 2022, but a few school districts continued mandatory masking. Of the more than 70 public, noncharter school districts in the greater Boston area, only 2 — the Boston and neighboring Chelsea school districts — sustained masking requirements through June 2022. How this policy change affected Covid-19 incidence is not known.

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

Design: A difference-in-differences analysis was performed to estimate the weekly and cumulative effects of lifting masking on the incidence of Covid-19 in school districts in the greater Boston area during the 15 weeks after the statewide masking policy was rescinded.

Methods: The investigators compared the incidence of Covid-19 in school districts that lifted masking requirements with the incidence in districts that kept the requirements in place.

RESULTS

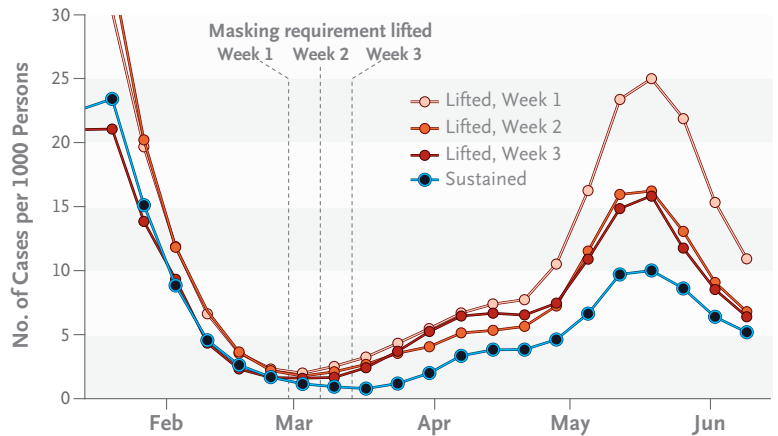
The lifting of masking requirements was staggered over a 3-week period. During the 15 weeks after the statewide masking policy was rescinded, districts that no longer required masks had a higher incidence of Covid-19 than districts that kept masking requirements in place, with a significant difference during 12 of the 15 weeks and with a stronger protective effect noted for staff than for students. One third of Covid-19 cases that occurred in schools that did not have a mask mandate during this time were associated with the lifting of masking requirements.

LIMITATIONS

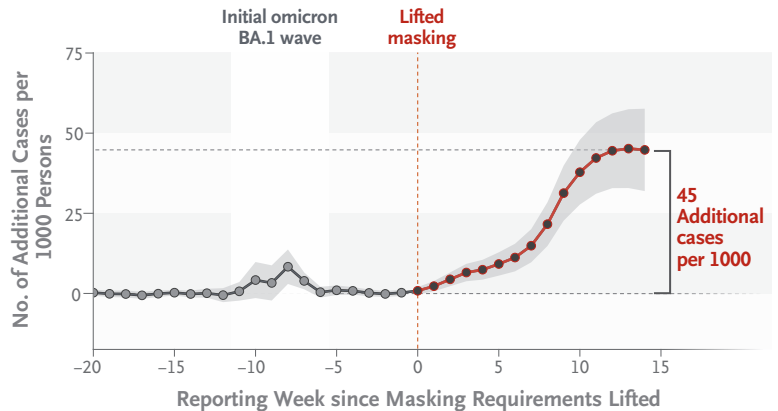
- The investigators did not have access to data regarding Covid-19 testing in individual school districts.
- The investigators did not assess the efficacy of masks specifically, but of universal masking policies, since the use of masks was still encouraged in schools.

Links: [Full Article](#) | [NEJM Quick Take](#) | [Editorial](#)

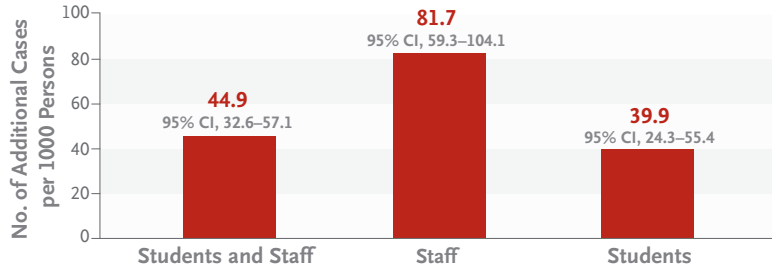
Covid-19 Cases According to Masking Requirement



Cumulative Difference (districts that lifted masking vs. districts that sustained masking)



Cumulative Difference at 15 Weeks (districts that lifted masking vs. districts that sustained masking)



CONCLUSIONS

Lifting of masking requirements was associated with a subsequent increase in Covid-19 cases among students and staff in public schools in the greater Boston area.