



August 25, 2021

Governor Ron DeSantis  
State of Florida  
The Capitol  
400 S. Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis,

On behalf of the 1,700 people in Florida living with cystic fibrosis (CF), we write to urge Florida to repeal Executive Order 21-175 (Ensuring Parents' Freedom to Choose – Masks in Schools) to allow K-12 schools to implement mask mandates to protect students and staff during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we urge you to direct school districts to offer remote learning during the 2021-2022 academic year if masks are not mandated as an accommodation for students at higher risk for severe illness from the virus, including those with CF.

#### **About cystic fibrosis and COVID-19**

Cystic fibrosis is a life-threatening genetic disease that affects more than 30,000 people in the United States, including 750 children in Florida. CF is a complex, multi-system disease that causes the body to produce thick, sticky mucus that clogs the lungs and digestive system, which can lead to life-threatening infections. Cystic fibrosis is both serious and progressive; while great strides have been made in the treatment of the disease, lung damage caused by infection is irreversible and can have a lasting impact on length and quality of life.

As COVID-19 continues to present a serious and ongoing risk to Florida residents, both children and adults living with CF remain at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, as compared to those without underlying conditions.<sup>1</sup> Community transmission of the virus remains high in Florida and, as of August 23<sup>rd</sup>, over 149,000 new cases in Florida have been reported in the past week, the highest number of any state in the country.<sup>2</sup> In light of the recent emergence of the Delta and other new variants, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that Americans continue to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and protect those who are most vulnerable to infection.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Repeal Executive Order 21-175 to extend flexibility for all K-12 schools**

The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation believes that in-person learning is vital for children's social development and emotional well-being. However, especially in the absence of approved vaccinations for children under age 12, precautions like masking remain a vital tool in preventing infection and spread of the virus; both the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend universal masking in schools at this time, with the goal of keeping students safe and physically present in school.<sup>4,5</sup> We support these recommendations and urge school districts

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/symptoms.html#higher-risk>

<sup>2</sup> [https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases\\_casesper100klast7days](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesper100klast7days)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

to require all teachers, staff, students, and visitors at K-12 schools to wear masks at school, regardless of vaccination status, to ensure a safe return to in-person learning.

**Extend remote learning accommodations for the 2021-2022 academic year**

In addition to allowing school districts the flexibility to implement safety measures for their staff and students, we urge you to direct school districts in Florida to extend remote learning as an accommodation for high-risk students and their families, including children with CF and their siblings, if they do not implement a mask requirement. This request echoes the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) that “special considerations and accommodations to account for the diversity of youth should be made, especially for populations facing inequities, including those who are medically fragile or complex.”<sup>6</sup> The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation believes that the decision to return to in-person learning should be made on a case-by-case basis and is best left to a child’s family and their care team.

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The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation urges you to swiftly repeal Executive Order 21-175 to permit all K-12 schools to implement mask requirements and to advise local school districts to adopt remote learning as an option for people with CF and their families during the 2021-2022 academic year if masking is not required. We stand ready to serve as a resource to the legislature and to the state as they plan for the reopening of K-12 schools this fall. Please contact Adam Kellermann at [akellermann@cff.org](mailto:akellermann@cff.org) or (240) 200-3713 if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



Mary B. Dwight  
Chief Policy & Advocacy Officer  
Senior Vice President, Policy & Advocacy

cc: Commissioner Richard Corcoran, Florida Department of Education  
Dr. Scott Rivkees, Florida Surgeon General and State Health Officer for the Florida Department of Health

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<sup>6</sup> <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>