

What does the evidence show about the containment measures used in schools to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Clinical Question

How effective were the different types of measures implemented in the school setting at reducing transmission of COVID-19?

Bottom Line

Assessing the measures used to reduce contacts suggest that, if fully in-person teaching is not possible for a variety of reasons, hybrid teaching (a combination of in-person and remote teaching) could be the most favourable option to ensure that students maintain some in-person teaching and school contact, whilst reducing transmission. Online teaching has been found to be associated with negative unintended consequences and the widening of inequalities. Thus, if in-person teaching is not possible, hybrid teaching is preferable to remote teaching, the ultimate goal would be to maintain in-person teaching, so measures that facilitate this should be the preferred option.

This review showed that there may have been a beneficial effect of mask mandates on transmission-related outcomes. Full mandates were probably more beneficial than partial or no mandates. Evidence of a beneficial effect of physical distancing on risk of infection among staff and students was mixed. Ventilation measures probably reduced cases among staff and students.

Daily testing strategies to replace or reduce quarantine probably helped to reduce missed school days and decrease the proportion of asymptomatic school contacts testing positive. Daily testing may have helped prevent onward transmission from contacts of a positive case.

Caveat

Evidence was identified mainly from the USA, with additional studies from the UK, Canada, Israel, and Germany. This may limit the applicability and generalizability of findings to other countries.

Context

This Cochrane review assessed several public health and social measures that were implemented in schools to contain the spread of COVID-19 and prevent onward transmission.

Cochrane Systematic Review

Littlecott H, Krishnaratne S, Burns J, Rehfuess E, Sell K, Klinger C, Strahwald B, Movsisyan A, Metzendorf M-I, Schoenweger P, Voss S, Coenen M, Müller-Eberstein R, Pfadenhauer LM. Measures implemented in the school setting to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2024, Issue 5. Art. No.: CD015029. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD015029.pub2. This review contains 15 studies.

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Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD015029.pub2/full>