



Letter to the Editor

An outbreak of upper respiratory tract infections in young children during the COVID-19 pandemic: A lesson from Hong Kong

Chuanshan Xu ^{*1}, Siu Kan Law ², Albert Wingnang Leung ^{*3}

1- Key Laboratory of Molecular Target and Clinical Pharmacology, State Key Laboratory of Respiratory Disease, School of Pharmaceutical Sciences & Fifth Affiliated Hospital, Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou 511436, China.

2- Faculty of Science and Technology, The Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong, Tsing Yi, New Territories, Hong Kong.

3- School of Graduates Studies, Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong.

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Dear Editor

The pandemic of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (COVID-19) has brought enormous challenges to children at schools worldwide [1]. In early 2020, COVID-19 pandemic forced the Hong Kong government to lock down all the kindergartens and primary schools in Hong Kong district. The young children have to stay at home for online courses, enhancing the family burden to care for them as well as decreasing their social activities. Up to the early spring semester of 2020, COVID-19 pandemic has eased in Hong Kong. All the online courses returned to normal face-to-face classes. The children in all the kindergartens and primary schools were required to wear face masks back to their

schools. However, outbreaks of upper respiratory tract infections (URTI) were recently reported in the wearing masks of young children in Hong Kong kindergarten and primary schools. Even though these children with URTI were not found to have caught COVID-19, the government considering the pressures from the COVID-19 crisis and winter flu season declared that Hong Kong kindergartens were closed and all the face-to-face lessons from the first grade to the third grade were stopped in the primary schools for two weeks [2-4].

In the view of COVID-19 pandemic, wearing masks is generally considered a simple and effective measure for the prevention of viral transmission. **Leung NHL et al.** reported that surgical face masks had preventive effectiveness against the transmission of human coronaviruses and influenza viruses from symptomatic individuals [1]. **Prather KA et al.** also thought that masks could reduce airborne transmission of COVID-19 virus and that wearing masks were necessary to combat the asymptomatic spread of aerosols and droplets by analyzing the epidemiological features of COVID-19 [4]. However, **Snape and Viner** recently made a general survey of COVID-19 in children and young people to find that children and adolescents were less susceptible to the SARS-CoV-2 virus than adults, and hospitalization for severe acute COVID-19 and case

fatality were rare and relatively low, demonstrating that children and young people had a low risk of COVID-19. At the same time, they also found that some preventive measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic had caused disproportionate harm to the children's health and rights, e.g., accidents increased at home during the COVID-19 lockdown posed a higher threat to children in Italy. School closures and lockdowns had adverse impacts on the mental health of children [5]. More recent evidence that the URTI outbreak in the wearing-masks young children occurring in Hong Kong campus gives us a lesson for rethinking the effectiveness of precautions taken in young children for preventing COVID-19 spread. More studies on the effectiveness of preventive measures in young children are an urgent need for further protecting children and combating COVID-19.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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