

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Senator Gregg Schmedes Urges Health Secretary to Remove Mask Mandate for Youth Sports

Request follows recent story of high school runner who collapsed during masked cross country race

SANTA FE – Senator Gregg Schmedes, M.D., (District 19-Bernalillo, Sandoval, Santa Fe, and Torrance) today sent a letter to Secretary of Health, Dr. Tracie Collins, urging her to remove the mask mandate for youth sports. Senator Schmedes' request comes on the heels of a recent [KROE news story](#) regarding a Rio Rancho high school runner who collapsed during a masked cross country competition.

"As we enter the summer months and as temperatures rise, it is more important than ever that we remove the mask requirement for children competing in sports," said Senator Schmedes, a board certified ENT. "Under the current state COVID-Safe Practices, intercollegiate and professional athletes are not required to wear masks while on the court or field. It only makes sense that our children would be given the same freedom."

A recent [study from the British Journal of Sports Medicine](#) revealed that masks led to a 14 percent decrease in exercise time and a 29 percent decrease in maximal oxygen consumption. The study concluded, "Compared with no mask, participants reported feeling increasingly short of breath and claustrophobic at higher exercise intensities while wearing a cloth face mask."

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New Mexico State Senate

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April 22, 2021

The Honorable Tracie C. Collins, M.D.
Secretary, New Mexico Department of Health
1190 S. St. Francis Drive
Santa Fe, NM 87505

Dear Secretary Collins:

It is out of respect to my constituents in Senate District 19 that I write you regarding the issue of youth wearing masks during sports.

As a father of young athletes and a former Division I athlete myself, sports are incredibly important to me on a personal level. Recently, a high school runner in Rio Rancho collapsed while wearing a mask during a cross country race. As I watch so many professional and NCAA athletes – even our own New Mexico United soccer team – compete on television with none of them wearing masks, it seems conflicting to me that our New Mexico children are required to compete with their mouths and noses covered. In order to protect the health and well-being of these younger athletes, I humbly urge you to bring consistency to our COVID-Safe Practices and remove the mask requirement for youth sports.

I cannot help but ask why young people, a group at the lowest risk, are required to wear masks during sports while adult professionals, at higher risk, do not wear masks? When football players are cutting holes in their masks to place their mouth guards, why is this considered a legitimate public health measure? When countless soccer players have masks around their chin while they play, why do we continue to require them? And why do we continue to restrict access to exercise when these very activities have been shown to benefit health and thus reduce COVID morbidity risk?

As a board-certified otolaryngologist, I spend most of my days helping people breathe better. I also have experience helping athletes achieve better breathing, which nearly always leads to improved athletic performance and safety. The data supporting mask-wearing during exercise is scarce, while the most cited study only included twelve adults in a temperature-controlled setting. There is simply no evidence to show that this policy reduces transmission, while larger prospective studies do not support masks in these settings.

The Honorable Tracie C. Collins, M.D.

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I ask you as a fellow physician, can you please work with me to bring an end to this policy this month? There are countless examples nationally and in all of our surrounding states of youth competing in sports without masks and without any evidence of increased COVID transmission. Furthermore, as you know, young populations are at very low risk from COVID – lower than seasonal influenza – and they have been proven to not be super-spreaders of the virus.

I personally know dozens of families who are keeping their children out of sports because of the mask mandate. The benefits of sports are countless, including research showing improved self-esteem, which can even decrease the risk of intimate partner violence victimization later in life. It is time to lift this restriction so our children do not miss out on the benefits of sports. As we enter the summer months and temperatures rise, it is important that we address this issue now.

It was an honor to cast a vote in your favor during your confirmation, as I have no doubt you are uniquely qualified to address New Mexico's overall health. I look forward to your response on this pressing matter and I thank you for your consideration.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gregg Schmeedes', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

GREGG SCHMEDES, M.D.

State Senator