



## Second Joint Statement of the Federation of Independent Waldorf Schools and the Medical Section at the Goetheanum on the Covid-19 Pandemic

*Hamburg/Dornach, November 9, 2020:* Corona, this much is becoming increasingly clear, is not a temporary nightmare that will soon blow away. We will have to learn to live with it as we do with other dangerous pathogens. In the medium term we will succeed in doing so, but for now the pandemic has shaken up most of our well-established social, communicative, interactive, cultural and hygienic habits – and will probably continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

With the number of infections rising steeply again throughout Europe since the beginning of autumn, as the sun's intensity<sup>1</sup> diminishes, we see an increase in the insecurities, fears, frustrations and tensions that burden our society as a whole, but especially educators, teachers and parents in kindergartens and schools, who find themselves confronted with ever new restrictions. The responsible committees of these institutions are faced with the difficult task of having to implement the official regulations on the one hand, while at the same time ensuring that an educational life can unfold which opens up encounters with the environment for children through sensory experiences, their desire to feel with the world and their urge to move, as well as through their imagination, their curiosity and their will to think. This has increasingly led to conflicts that can only be overcome if the partial justification of contradictory aspects can be recognized in collegial discussions and then creative solutions are sought. Waldorf education offers an inexhaustible variety of possibilities to pave new ways according to the situation. Strictly speaking, this is what makes them what they are.

### Masks and social distancing rules

Currently, masks and social distancing rules occupy a large part of the debate. The well-known neurologist Manfred Spitzer<sup>2</sup> summarizes the medical literature on the subject as follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> Corona viruses have been proven to be sensitive to UV light and vice versa, especially in humid cold.

<sup>2</sup> Spitzer, M.: Gesichtsmasken im Unterricht. Vor- und Nachteile der Bedeckung der unteren Gesichtshälfte in Zeiten der Corona-Pandemie. „Zschr f Nervenheilkunde 2020, 39, S. 522- 532. Other scientific literature: Ines Kappstein: Krankenhaushygiene up2date, 2020;15(03):279-295, DOI: 10.1055/a-1174-6591. She draws a critical conclusion. The statement of the Robert Koch Institute is the opposite: Mund-Nasen-Bedeckung im öffentlichen Raum als weitere Komponente zur Reduktion der Übertragungen von COVID-19. Strategie-Ergänzung zu empfohlenen Infektionsschutzmaßnahmen und Zielen (3rd Update). Epid Bull 2020;19:3- 5, DOI: 10.25646/6731

- ***“In principle, face masks reduce the spread of viruses during a pandemic”***. This is the case, for example, with surgical type face masks, which are now commonly worn. In unfavorable cases they can “also aggravate under certain conditions”. This applies to incorrect handling, as is to be expected with younger children, or may also be the case if mask wearers breathe more deeply during exertion, for example.
- ***The prolonged wearing of masks can cause physical discomfort, especially headaches, in many people***. These are usually classified as mild but can also be stronger. We need to differentiate, since many schoolgirls begin to develop headaches or even migraine complaints when they reach school age (also before corona) while headaches are very rare at pre-school age. Mask-related headaches usually disappear quickly during a mask break. The eyes of mask-wearers are increasingly irritated because the exhaled air flows past them. In this context, we would like to point out that drinking fluids in sufficient quantities can both relieve headaches and improve the moisture of the mucous membranes.
- In professions where the wearing of face masks is compulsory, ***mask breaks of the duration of a school break are required several times a day***. Every Waldorf institution should think about how mask breaks can be realized according to the rules. Breaks can considerably reduce the above-mentioned side effects of the masks and, if dried properly during the mask break, can also prevent the mask from becoming soaked through, which itself can have negative effects.
- **Manfred Spitzer, already quoted above, clearly points out that masks impair speech intelligibility, emotional communication and face recognition**. These aspects must be considered and, if possible, compensated for by speaking clearly (not necessarily louder), by using body language and by appropriate consideration.
- ***The scientific literature still points out that the term “children” does not adequately address the different situations of younger children up to the age of 10 and older children.***  
***Younger children have proven to be much less infectious than adults (teachers, educators)*** (e.g., according to the data from the ongoing Co-Ki study [www.co-ki.de](http://www.co-ki.de)). Even when young children are infected, the illness does not pose a relevant health risk. They also have more difficulty in handling masks properly, which can promote infections. The problem of inhaled residual air in the mask (“dead air space”) is relatively greater. ***For example, there is still insufficient scientific evidence that the wearing of masks by children of primary school age or below is medically justified and can be positively evaluated in a benefit-risk assessment. Comparative studies in this age group are completely lacking, and no one can cite reliable evidence. This should lead to particularly intensive dialogue about avoiding masks in this age group (elementary school and below).***

## Necessary consequences

**We therefore call for protective measures for schools and kindergartens to be drawn up by an interdisciplinary, broadly based committee, measures which can be implemented according to age and which do not disproportionately restrict the need for children and**

**young people to meet and exercise.<sup>3</sup> Any associated restrictions on fundamental rights require narrow time limits and regular and timely legitimation by parliaments.**

## Regardless

Schools should be places where children and adolescents can have practical, social, emotional and cognitive experiences in a protected space. An innovative core idea of Waldorf education is to promote the health development of pupils through appropriate pedagogical measures. An information sheet summarizes what else can be done specifically to promote health in the current situation.<sup>4</sup> Basically, younger children in particular need the security of knowing that their parents and teachers are working together, that they are protected because of this and that in the end all will be well. The question is therefore, how do they experience self-efficacy despite the regulations, how do they encounter the world and other people and gain the certainty that they can understand their experiences in a thinking way? Such basic experiences are necessary and possible at any age. Waldorf education means creating the conditions for successfully doing this – with or without traditional curricula.

## Practical examples

A few examples, all of which come from practical experience, may illustrate this. If classrooms are too small or too difficult to ventilate, lessons may be moved to large rooms or empty halls that allow movement, music and other activities with proper distancing. School gardens, parks, barns and forests offer many opportunities for sensory experiences and exercise in the open air, for practical work, social and ecological activities, research and art projects. This is essential, especially for younger children. Exciting outdoor expeditions are always more fruitful than the recurring experience of not being able to do anything “right”. Accordingly, one sports and geography teacher in Hamburg has only moved two out of 60 teaching days inside. The North German rule that there is no such thing as bad weather, only wrong clothing, can help, even in a pandemic.

Our experiences at home, on the street, with each other and in the media provide opportunities for all age groups to work on this. Since younger and younger children are communicating via social media (intensified by the current contact restrictions) it is important to watch what happens to them there. How do they protect themselves and others? How do they know who is reading along? How do they find out who they can trust on these platforms? The brochure “[Media Education in Waldorf Schools](#)” by the Federation of Independent Rudolf Steiner Schools<sup>5</sup> offers many practical suggestions that lead from this to an understanding of artificial intelligence in upper school classes. Thorough source analysis and criticism of online media should be part of the basic curriculum in the upper school anyway, but in view of the current debate on the prerogative of interpretation of verified or “fake” news, this has immediate explosive importance for society.

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BdFWS statements on August 13 and October 5, 2020 (the linked texts are in German):

<https://www.waldorfschule.de/ueber-uns/corona-faq>

<sup>4</sup> [https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/GAAD\\_Gesundheit\\_Kinder\\_Corona\\_en.pdf](https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GAAD_Gesundheit_Kinder_Corona_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Link to text in German: <https://www.waldorfschule.de/paedagogik/medienmuendigkeit>

In the natural sciences and the humanities, the relationships between viruses and bacteria and the human immune system<sup>6</sup> and tormented nature<sup>7</sup> can be studied, as well as basic economic concepts, the separation of powers, human rights and the concept of freedom in modern civil societies.

The important role of art and handicrafts is made even more obvious by the social distancing rules because these activities combine the formation of individual skills with an experience of community, thus forming an active and experiential counterbalance to current divisive tendencies.

The pandemic demands a great deal from each one of us. Therefore, increased efforts are needed from everyone involved in schools and kindergartens, and from parents and political decision-makers, to master the current situation with a sense of proportion and to create fear-free spaces for children and adolescents which, with pedagogical imagination and lively creativity, will become strengthening learning environments for them.

Henning Kullak-Ublick  
Federation of Independent Rudolf Steiner Schools

Georg Soldner  
Medical Section at the Goetheanum

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hardtmuth, Th.: Die Rolle der Viren in Evolution und Medizin - Versuch einer systemischen Perspektive. Tycho de Brahe Jahrbuch, Naturwiss. Sektion am Goetheanum, 2019, p. 125 – 184.

<sup>7</sup> A sad current example is the killing of 17 million minks in Denmark at the beginning of November 2020, after the SARS-CoV-2 virus jumped from humans to animals and back again and mutated further.

<https://www.srf.ch/news/panorama/mutation-des-coronavirus-daenemark-toetet-millionen-nerze- aus-sorge-um-impfstoff>. Compare fundamental thoughts on this point by G. Soldner: What can medicine learn from the pandemic? (Video in German with simultaneous interpretation into English):

<https://goetheanum.co/en/news/covid-19-what-do-we-learn-medically-during-the-pandemic-georg-soldner>.

Also available as a pdf: [https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Vortrag\\_Georg\\_Soldner\\_Reihe\\_Signaturen\\_12.10.2020\\_EN.pdf](https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Vortrag_Georg_Soldner_Reihe_Signaturen_12.10.2020_EN.pdf)