

Masking Guidance for Schools from the Public Health and Education Ad Hoc Committee

These guidance documents can advise school administrators, staff, and school based health professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic as they make complex decisions related to educational opportunities. The document was prepared by the Public Health and Education Ad Hoc Committee made up of public health, epidemiology, education policy, pediatric mental health and infectious disease leaders who have prepared their entire adult lives to advise us in this moment. Guidance presented is based on the best available science, best practices, and professional judgement of committee members at the time the documents are released. Their goal is to keep us safe through continued containment of COVID-19, while supporting the educational, physical, and emotional and mental health of our students, teachers, and parents.

Best Practices for K-12 Educational Settings:

- [CDC](#) and [AAP](#) recommends all people 2 years of age and older wear a cloth face covering when around people who don't live in the same household, especially when social distancing (staying at least 6 feet from others who are not from your household) is difficult to maintain.
 - See CDC Table: [Additional Considerations for Use of Cloth Face Coverings in K12 School](#)
- [Texas requires](#) all individuals age 10 years or older to wear a face covering (over the nose and mouth) "wherever it is not feasible to maintain 6 feet of social distancing from another person not in the same household." ([Governor's Executive Order GA-29](#))
- Have students wear face masks as much as possible, especially when in *hallways* or *bathrooms* or in proximity to students from other classes ([HSPH](#) p.7, 25). Children who ride the bus are recommended to wear their mask on the bus and follow any spaced seating rules. If carpooling, the driver and every child in a carpool is recommended to wear a mask for the entire trip. ([CDC](#))
- Include cloth face coverings on school supply lists and provide them as needed to students, teachers, staff, or visitors who do not have them available ([CDC](#)).
- Ensure masks meet effectiveness criteria in materials, and fit snugly over the nose bridge, mouth and chin. ([CDC](#), [WHO](#), [Stanford Medicine](#), [HSPH](#) p. 7, 26).
 - Masks or respirators with exhalation valves are not recommended, since they are not effective as source control and decrease protection of persons around the wearer. ([CDC](#))
 - Gaiter type neck fleece are not advised as face coverings for COVID-19 prevention, as there is evidence they offer little protection, and may [increase transmission](#) and dispersion of small droplets. ([Science Advances](#) 8/2020)
- Establish/reinforce a culture of health, safety and shared responsibility. Prior to school opening, train all students and staff on how to choose, correctly wear, care for, clean or discard, and store their masks ([CDC](#), [HSPH](#) p. 7, 26).
 - Ask parents, caregivers, and guardians to *practice* wearing cloth face coverings with students at home before the first day of school.
 - Please see Appendix A for a [summary of CDC's strategies](#) to support students' wearing cloth face coverings in schools by respective age groups.
- Ensure that students, teachers, and staff are aware that they are recommended to:

- [Wash](#) or [sanitize](#) their hands before *putting on* or *removing* their mask.
- Only touch the mask [by its straps](#), and [avoid touching the mask](#) while it is worn. If touching the mask is necessary for adjustment, they should wash their hands before and after with soap and water or sanitize hands.
- Remove masks correctly, being careful [not to touch eyes, nose or mouth](#) when removing,
- [Never share or swap](#) cloth face coverings with other persons. Students' masks should be [clearly identified](#) to indicate names or initials, top/bottom and front/back.
- Change their mask if it becomes [wet](#).
- [Wash cloth face coverings](#) *after every day* of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled.
- Consider bringing to school a container (e.g. labeled reusable bag) to store their mask when not wearing it (e.g. when eating).
- "Mask Breaks": Build in time throughout the day where students and staff can safely take a break from their masks to avoid 'mask fatigue' and to encourage compliance. For example, during time spent outside when distancing can be maintained. ([HSPH](#) p 7, 26).
- Masks should be stored in a space designated for each student that is separate from others when not being worn. Have *additional back-up masks* in case needed during the day. ([CDC](#), [HSPH](#) p26).
- [CDC](#) does **not** recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings
- Teachers may wear transparent face shields when teaching at the front of the room (greater than 6 feet from students) and additionally wear face masks when working more closely with students. ([HSPH](#) p.25)
- Clear face coverings (*not face shields*) may be used in selected circumstances ([CDC](#)). Include clear face coverings (*not face shields*) on school supply lists for teachers and staff who regularly interact with students who are deaf or hard of hearing, students learning to read, students with disabilities, and those who rely on lip reading as a part of learning, such as students who are English Language Learners ([CDC](#)).
- [Disposable medical masks](#) (such as surgical masks) are preferable instead of cloth masks for persons 60 years of age or older, or anyone with pre-existing medical conditions (such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease or cancer). ([WHO](#), June 6)
- [School nurses](#) and other assisting healthcare providers should wear disposable medical masks and appropriate PPE while in the school clinic. ([NASN](#)) Nurses should remove their facemask, perform hand hygiene, and put on their cloth face covering when leaving the clinic at the end of the shift. ([CDC](#)) Clinic nurses should also wear [eye protection](#) (goggles or face shield) *in addition to* their facemask during all patient care encounters. Fit-tested [N-95 respirators](#) are recommended to be worn for aerosol-generating procedures (e.g. nebulizer treatments) and physical assessments of any persons suspected of having COVID-19. ([CDC](#))
- Any [students who become ill at school](#) with possible symptoms of COVID-19 should be given a disposable medical (surgical) mask as soon as possible to wear as tolerated, until they are picked up from school or leave to a healthcare facility. ([NASN](#))
- Post printed guidance, such as infographics from organizations like the [WHO](#) and the [CDC](#) around the school. ([HSPH](#) p26, [WHO](#), [CDC](#), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/toolkits/schools.html>)

CDC and WHO have supported the use of cloth masks as methods of source control and infection prevention. Recent reports have supported cloth mask use to prevent community spread of infection by sick or asymptomatically infected persons ([CDC](#), [JAMA](#), [CDC MMWR](#)).

Summary of Practices and Recommendations: *(selected countries, states, agencies)*

- CDC Updated [July 23, 2020 Guidance](#):
 - Face coverings recommended in the following situations:
 - Students are seated less than 6 feet apart while riding a bus or carpooling
 - Students are less than 6 feet apart while entering or exiting school (e.g., carpool drop off/pick up) or while transitioning to/from other activities
 - Students are seated less than 6 feet apart in the classroom, or are engaging in learning stations or circle time that require close contact
 - Students are less than 6 feet apart while transitioning between classes or to other activities during the school day
 - Students participating in an assembly or event that requires close contact.
 - Student has a disability, childhood mental health conditions, sensory concern/tactile sensitivity.
 - Student is receiving one-on-one services or instruction.
- [Situations where face covering may not be feasible and recommended adaptations](#). *(CDC 7/23)*

CDC recognizes that there are specific instances when wearing a cloth face covering may not be feasible. In these instances, parents, teachers, and school administrators may consider [adaptations and alternatives](#) whenever possible. They may need to consult with healthcare providers for advice about wearing cloth face coverings.

 - **Consider use of clear face coverings that cover the nose and wrap securely around the face by some teachers and staff.** Clear face coverings should be determined not to cause any breathing difficulties or over heating for the person wearing it. Teachers and staff who may consider using clear face coverings include:
 - Those who interact with students or staff who are deaf or hard of hearing, per the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act external icon](#)
 - Teachers of young students learning to read
 - Teachers of students in English as a second language classes
 - Teachers of students with disabilities

N. B.: Face shields are not considered clear face coverings. CDC does **not recommend** use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a *substitute* for cloth face coverings because of a lack of evidence of their effectiveness for source control.
- Does not obviate need for social distancing: “Continue to keep about 6 feet between yourself and others. The cloth face cover is not a substitute for social distancing.”
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>
- Physical Exertion/ Physical Education: “People who are engaged in high intensity activities, like running, may not be able to wear a cloth face covering if it causes difficulty breathing. If unable to wear a cloth face covering, consider conducting the activity in a location with greater ventilation and air exchange (e.g. outdoors) and where it is possible to maintain physical distance (of at least 6 feet) from others.”

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>
- For youth sports, CDC advises that “Masks should be worn by coaches, youth sports staff, officials, parents, and spectators as much as possible” and recommends that “physical guides, such as signs and tape on floors or playing fields,” are provided “to make sure that coaches and players remain at least 6 feet apart.”
(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/youth-sports.html>)
- “Select a location for physical education instruction where students and staff can respect physical distancing guidelines and remain 6 feet apart.”
https://www.shapeamerica.org/advocacy/Reentry/in-school-instruction-with-physical-distancing_pe_physical-environment.aspx
- Face shields: “It is not known if face shields provide any benefit as source control to protect others from the spray of respiratory particles. CDC does not recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings. Some people may choose to use a face shield when sustained close contact with other people is expected. If face shields are used without a mask, they should wrap around the sides of the wearer’s face and extend to below the chin. Disposable face shields should only be worn for a single use. Reusable face shields should be cleaned and disinfected after each use..”
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html#feasibility-adaptations>
 - Reports of inadequate protection from face shields alone: [Canton of Grisons press release](#), [Insider Business news report](#)
- [Texas Education Agency \(TEA\) Aug 4, 2020](#):
 - “Full-face shields may be used in place of a mask to protect eyes, nose, and mouth whenever a mask is not feasible or whenever the education context may benefit from the ability to see an individual’s full face.”
 - “It may be impractical for students to wear masks or face shields while participating in some non-UIL athletic or other extracurricular activities. When it is impractical for students to wear masks or face shields during those activities, schools must require students, teachers, staff, and visitors to wear masks or face shields when entering and exiting facilities and practice areas and when not actively engaging in those activities. Schools may, for example, allow students who are actively exercising to remove masks or face shields, as long as they maintain at least six feet of distance from other students, teachers, and staff who are not wearing masks or face shields. However, schools must require students, teachers, and staff to wear masks or face shields as they arrange themselves in positions that will allow them to maintain safe distancing.”
- [National Education Association \(NEA\)](#):
 - Require all staff and students to wear masks of sufficient quality throughout the school day, except during meals. Schools must supply masks made of at least two-ply cotton to staff who are not carrying out disinfection procedures—which require greater protection—and students, in accordance with CDC recommendations
- [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#):
 - Pre-K: Face coverings (cloth) for children in the re-K setting may be difficult to implement. {Therefore considered a low-priority strategy}

- Elementary Schools: Children should wear face coverings when harms (eg, increasing hand-mouth/nose contact) do not outweigh benefits (potential COVID-19 risk reduction) –{Considered a higher priority strategy}
- Secondary Schools: Universal face coverings in middle and high schools when not able to maintain a 6-foot distance (students and adults). - {Suggested risk mitigation strategy}
- Harvard School of Public Health “[Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#)” (HSPH):
 - Mask breaks: “Wearing a mask all day long, each and every day will be challenging and frustrating. Over time, ‘mask fatigue’ may set in, and compliance may drop. To limit this, classrooms can incorporate ‘mask free’ time during the day. For example, consider taking masks off during time spent outside when distancing can be maintained, or during quiet classroom time when there is no talking and students can stay distanced, or have half the class leave the room for activities so the remaining group can distance and take masks off. Choosing lower-risk times for breaks from masks may help ensure masks are worn during higher-risk scenarios. The risks of viral transmission during mask breaks will be lower when other interventions, such as healthy building strategies (for indoor mask breaks) and physical distancing, are in place.”
- Selected States:
 - Massachusetts
 - Students grade 2 and above required to wear face mask/covering
 - Face shields may be an option for those students with medical, behavioral, or other challenges who are unable to wear masks/face coverings.
 - New Mexico
 - Face mask/covering required. Certain medical conditions exempt. May include face shield, but guidance is not specific
 - For transportation, required to wear mask or shield
 - Oregon
 - Face masks or shields recommended for students in 6th through 12th grade
 - Visitors may also use a face shield
 - Students can choose not to wear a face covering
 - Connecticut
 - All staff and students will be expected to wear a protective face covering or face mask that completely covers the nose and mouth when inside the school building, except for certain exceptions including when teachers are providing instruction.
 - Georgia
 - The use of face coverings/masks is not mandated but is strongly recommended, particularly in settings where social distancing is difficult to accomplish (i.e. during hallway transitions, drop-off/pick-up, etc.)
 - Kentucky
 - Students who are enrolled in first grade and above and staff should be required to wear a cloth face covering, unless medically waived. Masks can be lowered during classroom time if all students and staff are seated 6 feet apart and no persons are walking inside the classroom.
 - When students are outside and 6 feet from others, masks are not required.

Dallas County Masking Guidance for Schools - August 2020

- Pennsylvania
 - Provide protective face coverings (masks or face shields) to adults, including visiting adults.
 - Does not clearly address children
- California Department of Public Health
 - Face shields “with a drape on the bottom edge” are part of CA’s guidance, but *only for those with medical conditions* where a mask is not appropriate
 - Patients younger than age of 2 fall into the category of exempt to where face masks
 - “Persons exempted from wearing a face covering due to a medical condition who are employed in a job involving regular contact with others should wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it.”
 - https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/Guidance-for-Face-Coverings_06-18-2020.pdf
- New York
 - (Required) District/school plan has written protocol regarding students taking mask breaks.
- Singapore:
 - Initially provided guidance that face shields could be used in lieu of masks in late April, however this decision was reversed June 1st.
 - Face shields remained part of the guidance for children <12 years of age & for those with other conditions where a mask is not be appropriate
 - <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/guidance-for-use-of-masks-and-face-shields>
- Israel
 - Israel required masks for all children greater than age 7, masks required during bus trips as well
 - In May, there was a record heat wave where masking policy was lifted for approximately 1 week. Within 2 weeks after lifting the policy, outbreaks began to occur, particularly in middle-high school ages. Most notably in a middle and high school gymnasium
 - By mid-June, 503 students and 167 staff had been infected, and 355 schools had closed temporarily (~5000 schools in all of Israel)
 - <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/07/school-openings-across-globe-suggest-ways-keep-coronavirus-bay-despite-outbreaks>
- Face masks policies in other countries:
 - Not required: Sweden, Denmark, New Zealand, Switzerland, Norway, Germany (in some cases if students negative for SARS-CoV-2, tested every 4 days), Belgium (teachers required)
 - Only certain ages: France (secondary school), Israel (Age>7), Singapore (pre-K and primary wear face shields, up to age 12)
 - https://globalhealth.washington.edu/sites/default/files/COVID-19%20Schools%20Summary%20%282%29.pdf?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTkRreE5XWXIORFF3TXpNeClSnQiOjIbVnQTTVySEo0Vzk1cHVbZVVqWnFGVmR1UEJxRGdpd01mTXg4OGw3Mk5

[nTnpmaUoyMGt2UXlwWVZBOE5GVjlybHA5aStrbzJ3MUxsanoxamZibmlocmpSbXZyVFVo
V0VHYU1aTGx0RnpsMXlmOEtXSVJqaDJsZ0RJU1BQcVZjZSJ9](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/reopening-schools-covid-19-brief)

- <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/reopening-schools-covid-19-brief>

Appendix A. [CDC's](#) strategies to support students' wearing cloth face coverings in schools by age groups

| Elementary School Settings | Middle School Settings | High School Settings | Students with Special Healthcare Needs |
|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that teachers and school staff are available to help students put on and adjust face coverings as needed and that teachers and staff wash or sanitize their hands with hand sanitizer that includes at least 60% alcohol before and after doing so. • Play games or engage in other fun activities that teach students how to wear a face covering. • Consider using some art materials or other creative outlets to help students understand why face coverings help reduce the spread of COVID-19. • Share social stories about face coverings with students so they know what to expect at school. A social story is similar to a simple picture book that teaches students what to expect in social settings. • Use behavioral techniques, such as positive reinforcement, to increase the likelihood that students will comply with face covering guidance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show short videos or incorporate short lessons (less than 10 minutes) that teach students how to wear a face covering. Consider including videos with celebrities, musicians, athletes or other influencers popular among this age group. • Follow videos with verbal instructions that demonstrate the correct ways to wear a face covering. • Engage the class in discussions about why face coverings help reduce the spread of COVID-19. • Incorporate a lesson into the science curriculum on how respiratory droplets spread infectious disease. • Create a school competition for the best health communication strategy to highlight the importance of wearing a cloth face covering to middle school students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show videos or incorporate short lessons that teach students how to wear a face covering, including the correct and incorrect ways to wear a face covering. Consider including videos with celebrities, musicians, athletes, or other influencers popular among this age group. • Ask students to write a short paper on the science behind the use of cloth face coverings as a form of source control. • Create a school competition for the best health communication strategy to highlight the importance of wearing cloth face coverings to high school students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask parents, caregivers, and guardians to practice wearing face coverings at home before the student returns to school. • Share social stories about face coverings with students so they know what to expect at school. A social story is similar to a simple picture book that teaches students about what to expect in social settings. • Introduce students with sensory concerns or tactile sensitivities to face coverings with a variety of materials, prints, and textures, and advise them to choose which face covering is most comfortable. • Use behavioral techniques such as positive reinforcement to increase the likelihood that students will comply with face covering guidance and other prevention practices. |
| All Students | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parents, caregivers, and guardians to practice wearing cloth face coverings with students at home before the first day of school. If parents, caregivers, and guardians model appropriate use of face coverings and help students get used to wearing them, students may be more comfortable using them. • Introduce students with sensory concerns/tactile sensitivities to face coverings with a variety of materials, prints, and textures, and advise them to choose which face covering is most comfortable. • Use behavioral techniques such as positive reinforcement to increase the likelihood that students will comply with face covering guidance and other prevention practices. • Encourage parents, caregivers, and guardians to include students in the selection of their cloth face covering and/or the material that is used to make it. This might increase a child's acceptance of wearing the cloth face covering. • Display age appropriate posters and materials with visual cues that show the proper way to wear a face covering in classrooms and hallways. Consider incorporating images of popular influencers promoting or modeling use of cloth face coverings. • Include reminders about face coverings in daily announcements, school newspapers, and other All communication should be in an appropriate format, literacy level, and language. Consider including how to properly use, take off, and wash cloth face coverings in back-to-school communications educational materials. | | | |