



# Pennsylvania Department of Education

## *Face Coverings Frequently Asked Questions*

**On July 1, 2020, the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health announced an Order Requiring Universal Face Coverings.** The order, signed under Secretary Levine's authority under the Disease Prevention and Control Act, outlines the situations when a mask must be worn and includes limited exceptions to the face-covering requirement. Answers to questions school leaders may have regarding the application of this order in school settings is included below. Please reference this guidance as you plan to keep your students, staff, and school communities safe.

*This page was updated on August 17, 2020. The section that was updated is marked with an asterisk (\*).*

### **Does the Order of the Secretary of the PA Department of Health Requiring Universal Face Coverings apply to children and adults while in schools?**

Yes, this order applies to all students, staff and visitors age two and older while in school entities, including public K-12 schools, brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers (CTCs), intermediate units (IUs); educational programming for students in non-educational placements such as residential settings (boarding schools), residential facilities, detention centers, and hospital settings; PA Pre-K Counts, Head Start Programs and Preschool Early Intervention programs; and Private Academic Nursery Schools and locally funded prekindergarten activities.

The Order was effective July 1, 2020 and will remain in effect until the Secretary of Health determines the public health risk is sufficiently reduced so that face coverings are no longer necessary as a widely utilized public health tool. For the safety of students, staff and families and to avoid community spread of COVID-19, students and staff are considered to be members of the public who are congregating in indoor locations. As such, they are required to adhere to this Order.

The order is effective immediately and applies to all children aged two and older.

### **Why did the Secretary of the PA Department of Health issue this Order?**

The Secretary issued this Order to continue to protect all in the Commonwealth from the spread of COVID-19, mindful of the need to slow the increase in the number of cases as the Commonwealth reopens and in order to avoid the resurgence that is overwhelming the health care systems and public health systems in other states who have been less successful in reopening than the Commonwealth.

### **Is this Order temporary?**

This Order remains in effect until further notice.

## **What type of mask complies with this Order?**

The Order requires individuals to wear a "face covering." "Face covering" means a covering of the nose and mouth that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is wrapped around the lower face. A "face covering" can be made of a variety of synthetic or natural fabrics, including cotton, silk, or linen, and, for the purposes of the order, can include a plastic face shield that covers the nose and mouth. "Face coverings" may be factory-made, sewn by hand, or improvised from household items, including but not limited to, scarves, bandanas, t-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels. While procedural and surgical masks intended for health care providers and first responders, such as N95 respirators, would meet these requirements, these specialized masks should be reserved for appropriate occupational and health care settings.

## **\*Under what circumstances are students permitted to remove their face coverings (e.g. masks and face shields)?**

Schools may allow students to remove face coverings when students are:

- Eating or drinking when spaced at least 6 feet apart; or
- When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task; or
- At least 6 feet apart during "face-covering breaks" to last no longer than 10 minutes.

## **Do students with disabilities need to wear face coverings?**

Children two years and older are required to wear a face covering unless they have a medical or mental health condition or disability, documented in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or IDEA, that precludes the wearing of a face covering in school. Accommodations for such students should be made in partnership with the student's health care provider, school nurse, and IEP/504 team.

## **Do schools need to update/amend their Health and Safety Plans if they have already been submitted to PDE?**

Health and Safety Plans must reflect this Order. Understanding the volatility and uncertainty of the COVID-19 virus, plans should be flexible enough to contemplate any future change in conditions.

## **Do updated/revised Health and Safety Plans need to be re-approved by local school boards?**

Yes. While the Order must be implemented immediately, plan approval, if necessary, should occur at the next board meeting.

## **Do updated/revised Health and Safety Plans need to be resubmitted to PDE?**

Yes. PDE should always have the most recently approved Health and Safety Plans on file for each Local Education Agency (LEA).

## **Does the Order apply to athletes and sports activities?**

Yes. Everyone must wear a face covering, such as a mask, unless they fall under an exception listed in Section 3 of the Order. Coaches, athletes and spectators must wear face coverings unless they are outdoors and can consistently maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet. Athletes are not required to wear face coverings while actively engaged in workouts and competition that prevent the wearing of face coverings, but must wear face coverings when on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc. and anytime 6 feet of social distancing is not possible.

**Must an individual provide evidence that they qualify for an exception to the Order?**

Schools must require all students over 2 years of age to wear face coverings, except for any student who has a medical or mental health condition or disability that precludes the wearing of a face covering in school. Notwithstanding Section 3, Paragraph B of [Secretary Levine's July 1, 2020 Order regarding face coverings](#), schools may require such students to provide medical documentation. PDE recommends that any documentation that is provided be in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or IDEA of such medical or mental health condition or disability.

More information can be found in the [Public Health Guidance for School Communities](#) issued on July 15, 2020, which also contains provisions applicable to staff and visitors.

**Visit the [Pennsylvania Department of Health's website](#) for more information and additional answers to FAQs about the Universal Face Coverings Order.**