

Public Health Guidance Regarding COVID-19 for Phased Reopening of Pre-K to 12 Schools

From the Pennsylvania Department of Health and Pennsylvania Department of Education. To view all guidelines, please click [here](#).

Face Coverings and Masks

On July 1, 2020, the [Secretary of Health issued an Order requiring all individuals to wear a face covering](#) when they leave their homes. The order outlines situations when a face covering must be worn and includes limited exceptions (see Section 3 of the 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 that have been less successful in reopening than the Commonwealth.

This Order applies to any individual aged two and older whenever outside the home, including while in school entities, including public K-12 schools, brick and mortar, and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers, and intermediate units; 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; 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.

"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.

School Staff and Visitors

- Face coverings, such as masks or face shields, must be worn by all non-students, both staff and visitors (including parents and guardians), while on school property, including during student drop-off and pickup.
- Individuals must wear a face covering (mask or face shield) unless they have a medical or mental health condition or disability, documented in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, that precludes the wearing of a face covering in school.
- Teach and reinforce use of face coverings among all staff.
- Face coverings may be removed to eat or drink during breaks and lunch periods; however, at those times, social distancing must be practiced.
- Staff are not required to wear a face covering in situations where wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition to operate equipment or execute a task.
- Transparent face coverings provide the opportunity for more visual cues and should be considered as an alternative for younger students, students who are deaf and hard of hearing, and their teachers. Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or who has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication, are not required to wear a mask; however, individuals should consider using another type of face covering such as a plastic face shield and increase physical distancing.
- Have an adequate supply of face coverings and other personal protective equipment (PPE) at each school building and carefully monitor inventory. (See [Pennsylvania COVID-19 PPE & Supplies Business-2-Business \(B2B\) Interchange Directory](#) for assistance sourcing these materials.

Students

- All students must wear a face covering (cloth mask or face shield) that covers their nose and mouth inside the school and while outside when physical distancing is not feasible.
- 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.
- Teach students and families how to properly wear a face covering (cover nose and mouth), to maintain hand hygiene when removing the face covering for meals and physical activity, and how to replace and maintain (washing regularly) a cloth face covering.
- Schools should provide face covering breaks throughout the day. Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet during these face covering breaks. Schools may allow students to remove face coverings when students are:
 - Eating or drinking when spaced at least 6 feet apart;
 - Seated at desks or assigned workspaces at least 6 feet apart;
 - Engaged in any activity at least 6 feet apart (e.g., face covering breaks, recess, etc.); or
 - When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task.
- Transparent face coverings provide the opportunity for more visual cues and should be especially considered as an alternative for younger students, students who are deaf and hard of hearing, and their teachers.

Sports

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.