

Department of Health Executive Order Requiring Universal Face Coverings- Application for Schools

In light of the [Order Requiring Universal Face Coverings announced July 1, 2020](#) by the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, a list of answers to questions you 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.

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 individuals 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.

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 their face coverings when students are:

- 1. Eating or drinking when spaced at least 6 feet apart;*
- 2. Seated at desks or assigned work spaces at least 6 feet apart; or*
- 3. Engaged in any activity at least 6 feet apart (e.g. face covering breaks, recess, etc.).*

Do students with disabilities need to wear face coverings?

Any student who cannot wear a mask or face shield due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability, and students who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance are not required to wear face coverings. 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.

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?

No. Per the Order, students are not required to show documentation that an exception applies.

If you have additional questions, please direct them to: RA-EDEMERGENCYRESPONSE@pa.gov.

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