



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIES

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September 25, 2020

TO: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

FROM: Joel Sacks, Director *JS*

SUBJECT: **No change in facemask requirements in school settings**

You may be aware of several media reports quoting Tacoma School District delaying its scheduled 09/28 opening for kindergarten and special needs classes due to new guidance from L&I. It's also been called "clarified guidance." To be clear, L&I has not issued new guidance or changed any guidance on facial coverings in school settings. L&I does not require all school employees to use N95 masks.

In most cases, where social distancing is possible cloth face masks provide the necessary protection in classroom settings. In some high risk situations, such as a school health official helping an ill student, higher levels of protection offered by respirators like N95s are needed. Employers determine which employees may be in such situations, and those employees must be medically cleared, then fit tested.

Tacoma Schools asked us this week if school employees must follow the requirements for wearing an N95 and similar respirators — medical clearance and fit testing. We explained that cloth masks are adequate for many employees, and we confirmed that for employees the district determines should use these respirators they must go through these steps. This is not new and it is not a change. The standards for respirators have been the same for decades.

We support decisions by schools and all employers to re-open only when appropriate precautions are taken to best prevent the spread of coronavirus. It's important to share with all school districts that only those employees who have been deemed to need respirators must undergo the process of clearance and fit testing. It's equally important to point out that nothing has changed in this guidance and L&I has no plans to increase the requirements.

I hope that this helps clear up any misconceptions stemming from the media coverage of the Tacoma School District situation.