

UASD Winter Sports 2020-2021 Mask Update

November 23, 2020

We have incorporated the wearing of masks in our return to school and return to athletics plans as one of the mitigating techniques to help stop the spread of COVID-19. During the Fall sports season, the caveat was that students in activity did not need to wear a mask. Fast forward to November 17, 2020, the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health updated the mask order requiring universal face coverings. This order applies to athletes in activity both indoors and outdoors who are actively engaged in workouts and competition. The updated mask order does provide exceptions under Section 3 of the order which states that face coverings need not be worn if the person meets one of the exceptions in Section 3 of the Order. On Friday, November 20, 2020, a vague update regarding Section 3 of the order was released by the PA Department of Health through correspondence with the PIAA. The interpretation of Section 3, part A and B of the order is at question. Below is Section 3, part A and B:

Section 3: Exceptions to Covering Requirement The following are exceptions to the face covering requirements in Section 2. All alternatives to wearing a face covering, including the use of a face shield, should be exhausted before an individual is excepted from this Order.

- A. If wearing a face covering while working would create an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.
- B. If wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or a disability.

Guidance from Stock and Leader on November 23, 2020 about the Order and more specifically exceptions to the Order under Section 3 of the Order are that the district determines if the wearing of masks would be harmful or create an unsafe condition and whether or not masks would cause a medical condition, exacerbate an existing condition such as a respiratory issue that impedes breathing, a mental health condition or a disability. I am in no way a medical expert but through communication and research, below is information related to why wearing a mask could/would be unsafe during activity or competition:

1. Vigorous exercise while wearing a mask could promote decreased airflow through the mask which can effect breathing.
2. Effected breathing can inhibit ability to properly regulate body temperature.
3. Expose underlying health conditions in athletes.
4. Facemasks are likely to get wet during exercise and make it much more difficult to breathe through a mask. Hot and humid conditions can make this much worse.
5. The act of wrestling and basketball and wearing a mask could have the potential to increase the chances of non-COVID related injury during play. Both sports are contact sports and as such increase the chances of masks not staying in place during competition.
6. If a mask gets saturated during a competition, this would promote an extremely unsanitary situation to the opponent if the mask is touched by any part of the body.

If an exception to the November 20, 2020 updated mask order is plausible for UASD, this protocol is intended to apply only to winter sports 2020-2021. We will revisit for Spring Sports 2020-2021. Expectations for students and staff are outlined in the Athletics Health and Safety Plan and will be outlined in the UASD Winter Athletics Addendum 2020-2021. We would also communicate expectations via coaches meetings, team meetings and digital communication such as email, UASD website and social media.

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