FACE COVERINGS

Due to the circulating and highly contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus, the CDC recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status (Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools | CDC).

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) it is possible to have COVID-19 but not have any symptoms. AAP asserts that wearing face coverings is vitally important, especially for unvaccinated children. Masks reduce the chance of spreading SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Until a child is fully vaccinated against COVID-19, they should continue to wear a face covering and keep a safe physical distance indoors around people they don't live with or who may have the virus. Anyone unvaccinated should also wear face coverings outdoors in large group settings or when physical distancing isn't possible (Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools | CDC).

Executive Order 253 has declared that as of October 18, 2021, all staff members who are eligible to be vaccinated against COVID-19 must receive the vaccine or be subject to routine COVID-19 testing. Executive Order 253 also applies to contracted employees, vendors, providers and any other individuals working in the schools where regular visits to the schools are part of the individual's job duties, including volunteers.

According to N.J.S.A. 26:13-3, the Governor of the State has the authority to declare a public health emergency. According to N.J.S.A. App.A:9-33, the purpose of the Civilian Defense and Disaster Control Act is to "provide for the health, safety and welfare of the people of the State of New Jersey and to aid in the prevention of damage to and the destruction of property during any emergency … by prescribing a course of conduct for the civilian population…." According to N.J.S.A. App.A:9-40, public officials are required to fully cooperate with the Governor in all matters affecting any declared emergency and may not take any action that conflicts with or impedes Executive Order 253.

Therefore, in accordance with Executive Order No. 251, and Executive Order 253, the recommendations made by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the district shall require that all staff, students, and visitors use face coverings in the indoor portion of the school district premises.

Face Coverings

A. Staff, students, and visitors are required to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the person's health. It is necessary to acknowledge that enforcing the use of face coverings may be impractical for young children or individuals with disabilities. Exceptions to the requirement:

    1. When doing so would inhibit the individual's health, such as when the individual is exposed to extreme heat indoors;
    2. When the individual has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face coverings without assistance;
    3. When a student's documented medical condition or disability, as reflected in an individualized education program (IEP) or Educational Plan pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, precludes use of a face covering;
    4. When a student's documented medical condition, as reflected in an individualized health care plan (IHP) precludes use of a face covering;
    5. When the individual is under two (2) years of age;
    6. When the individual is engaged in activity that cannot physically be performed while wearing a mask, such as eating or drinking, or playing a musical instrument that would be obstructed by a face covering;
    7. When the individual is engaged in high-intensity aerobic or anaerobic activity;
    8. When a student is participating in high-intensity physical activities during a physical education class in

FACE COVERINGS (continued)

a well-ventilated location and able to maintain a physical distance of six feet from all other individuals; or

9. When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task;
10. Students and staff being transported in connection with school-related activities shall continue to adhere to current CDC guidelines for public transportation.

As specified in Executive Order 253, individuals seeking a medical exemption from mask wearing shall produce written documentation from a medical professional (e.g. licensed physician, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, or registered nurse) to support the exemption. Self-attestations and parental attestations are not sufficient for this purpose.

B. Individuals shall be frequently reminded not to touch the face covering and to wash their hands frequently;

C. Information shall be provided to staff, students, and students' families on proper mask hygiene, including use, removal, storage/maintenance, and washing of face coverings;

D. Currently, the CDC does not recommend use of face shields as a substitute for face coverings. Therefore, they may not be used to satisfy the face covering requirement detailed above. However, they may be an option for students with medical or other challenges that preclude the use of face coverings. If face shields are used without a mask, they should wrap around the sides of the wearer's face and extend to below the chin;

E. Students and educators that rely on facial cues may consider the use of clear face coverings where available. This might include students who are deaf or hard of hearing, students receiving speech/language services, young students in early education programs, and English-language learners;

F. Researchers have identified "frequent discomfort" as a potential challenge associated with implementing use of face covering requirements. Students and staff shall be provided face covering breaks throughout the day. Face covering breaks should only occur when social distancing can be maintained and ideally outside or with windows open ("Physical Distancing, face coverings, and eye protection to prevent person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19: a systematic review and meta-analysis");

G. Face coverings shall be provided by the student's family/guardian and may be included as part of the back to school supplies list provided to families/guardians prior to the start of the school year. The district shall strive to provide extra disposable face coverings for students who need them, and shall provide face coverings for students that are experiencing financial hardship and are unable to afford them to the greatest extent possible.

Social Distancing During a Pandemic

In addition to the requirement that all staff, students and visitors wear face coverings, the district shall ensure that social distancing within the schools and classrooms is maintained to the maximum extent practicable. This will be achieved by ensuring students are seated at least three feet apart. When conditions such as space in the classroom or other areas of the school make a physical distance of three feet difficult or impossible to maintain, additional modifications shall be implemented. These include but are not limited to using physical barriers between desks and turning desks to face the same direction (rather than facing each other) or having students sit on only one side of the table, spaced apart. During times of higher community transmission of the COVID-19 virus and the Delta Variant, the district may increase the physical distance up to six feet.

Any modifications that are made to school district facilities shall be in coordination with local code officials and Department county offices to ensure that alterations adhere to school safety requirements.

FACE COVERINGS (continued)

Social distancing practices shall be maintained on school buses (at least three feet of distance between riders) to the maximum extent practicable (see board policy 3541.33 Transportation Safety).

A. Screening and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

1. Adequate amount of personal protective equipment (PPE) shall be available, accessible, and provided for use by staff and students. Staff and students shall be required to wear masks when being admitted to the school and screened for entry;
2. The principal or his or her designee shall develop a school entry plan that includes:

    a. Staff assigned to do the screening;
    b. Designated entrances that will be used to admit students;
    c. The assignment of classes and grades to designated entrances and/or designated entrance times;

3. Staff must visually check students for symptoms upon arrival (which may include temperature checks) and/or confirm with families that students are free of COVID-19 symptoms;
4. Health checks must be conducted safely and respectfully, and in accordance with any applicable privacy laws and regulations;
5. Results must be documented when signs/symptoms of COVID-19 are observed;
6. Screening procedures shall take into account students with disabilities and accommodations that may be needed in the screening process for those students;

B. Procedures for symptomatic staff and students:

1. The school principal shall establish an isolation space;
2. Students and staff with symptoms related to COVID-19 shall be safely and respectfully isolated from others. Students should remain in isolation with continued supervision and care until picked up by an authorized adult;
3. The current Communicable Disease Service guidance for illness reporting shall be followed;
4. If a staff member becomes aware that an individual who has spent time in a district facility tests positive for COVID-19, the staff members shall notify the principal and the school nurse. The school nurse shall immediately notify local health officials, staff, and families of a confirmed case while maintaining confidentiality;

C. Preparations for when someone tests positive for COVID-19:

1. The school principal shall establish an isolation space;
2. Students and staff with symptoms related to COVID-19 shall be safely and respectfully taken to the designated isolation space and isolated from others. Students should remain in isolation with continued supervision and care until picked up by an authorized adult;
3. The current Communicable Disease Service guidance for illness reporting shall be followed;
4. Readmittance to school shall be consistent with Department of Health guidance and information for schools and Department of Health/Communicable Disease Service's Quick Reference Guidance on Discontinuation of Transmission-Based Precautions and Home Isolation for Persons Diagnosed with COVID-19;
5. Contact tracing shall be initiated including records of groups/cohorts, assigned staff, and daily attendance.

D. Protocols to address a positive case:

Students and employees may be asked to leave or not come into school if they test positive for COVID-19 or exhibit one or more of the symptoms of COVID-19, based on CDC guidance, that is not otherwise explained:

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1. A fever of 100° F or greater;
2. Cough;
3. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing;
4. Chills;
5. Repeated shaking with chills;
6. Muscle pain;
7. Headache;
8. Sore throat;
9. New loss of taste or smell;
10. Fatigue;
11. Congestion or runny nose;
12. Nausea or vomiting;
13. Diarrhea.

Adopted:
NJSBA Review/Update:
Readopted: , January 2024

Key Words

Immunizations, Inoculations, Examinations, Pupil Physical Examinations, Student Physical Examinations, Health

Resources:

The CDC recently issued updated guidance regarding considerations for wearing face coverings and how it can help slow the spread of COVID-19. Schools should refer to this guidance as it includes details regarding who should and should not wear a face covering:
Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools | CDC

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention "Your Guide to Masks" at: Your Guide to Masks | CDC

NJDOE School Reopening Frequently Asked Questions at:
https://www.nj.gov/education/reopening/faqs/#sd

NJDOE Update to Conditions of Learning, Health and Safety, "Critical Area of Operation #5: Screening, PPE, and Response to Students and Staff Presenting Symptoms" and "Critical Area of Operation #3: Transportation https://nj.gov/education/reopening/updates/docs/RestartUpdateFacecoverings080320.pdf

"Physical Distancing, face coverings, and eye protection to prevent person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19: a systematic review and meta-analysis;" September 21, 2020. D.K. Chu, S. Duda, K. Solo, S. Yaacoub, and H. Schunemann.
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7503118/

Legal References:

N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.6 through -4.8	Parents Right to Conscience Act of 1979
N.J.S.A. 18A:40-4	Examination for physical defects and screening of hearing of pupils; health records
N.J.S.A. 18A:40-4.4	Exemption
N.J.S.A. 18A:40-4.5	Immunity from action of any kind due to provisions of act
N.J.S.A. 18A:40-5	Method of examination; notice to parent or guardian
N.J.S.A. 18A:40-6	In general
N.J.S.A. 18A:40-7, -8, -10, -11	Exclusion of pupils who are ill
N.J.S.A. 18A:40-12.37	Release to share medical information

FACE COVERINGS (continued)

N.J.S.A. 18A:40-20	Immunization at public expense
N.J.S.A. 26:1A-9.1	Exemption of pupils from mandatory immunizations
N.J.S.A. 26:4-6	Prohibiting attendance of teachers or pupils
N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.4	Evaluation
N.J.A.C. 6A:16-1.1et seq. See particularly: N.J.A.C. 6A:16-1.1, -1.3, -2.1, -2.2, -2.3, -2.4	Programs to Support Student Development
N.J.A.C. 8:57-4.3	Medical exemptions
N.J.A.C. 8:57-4.4	Religious exemptions
N.J.A.C. 8:57-4.5	Provisional admission
N.J.A.C. 8:57-4.7	Records required
N.J.A.C. 8:57-4.8	Reports to be sent to the State Department of Health
N.J.A.C. 8:57-4.9	Records available for inspection
N.J.A.C. 8:57-4.22	Emergency power of the Commissioner, Department of Health and Senior
20 U.S.C.A. 1232h	Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment

Executive Order No. 251, Governor Philip D. Murphy, August 6, 2021.

Executive Order No. 253, Governor Philip D. Murphy, August 23, 2021.

The NJDOE Guidance: *The Road Back: Restart and Recovery* at: *https://www.nj.gov/education/reopening/*

The NJDOE Guidance: *The Road Forward: Health and Safety Guidance for the 2021-2022 School Year* at: *The Road Forward (nj.gov)*

Possible Cross References:

*1410	Local units
*4123	Classroom aides
*5111	Admission
*5113	Absences and excuses
*5131.6	Drugs, alcohol, tobacco (substance abuse)
*5141	Health
*5141.21	Administering medication
*5200	Nonpublic school pupils
*6142.4	Physical education and health
*6145.1/6145.2	Intramural competition; interscholastic competition
*6162.5	Research
*6164.4	Child study team
*6171.4	Special education

*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.