

Face Coverings

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Guidance Regarding Use of Face Coverings

Unless they have an approved medical exemption, all staff, students, and visitors over the age of two years old entering a New York City Department of Education (DOE) school building MUST wear a face covering in accordance with this guidance. Face coverings must be worn both indoors and outdoors when on DOE school grounds, regardless of COVID-19 vaccine status. As discussed below, developmentally appropriate efforts will be made to increase face covering adherence and tolerance for all students as needed.

What Is a Face Covering?

For the purposes of this guidance, a face covering is any well-secured cloth covering or disposable mask that covers a person's nose and mouth and is worn to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19.

- Acceptable face coverings include but are not limited to cloth-based face coverings (e.g., homemade, sewn, or quick-cut masks), and disposable surgical masks that cover both the mouth and nose.

Distribution of KN95 Masks

School-based staff may ask for a KN95 mask; school should give one to any staff member who asks. These masks are to be used for five days.

School-based staff who return from isolation from a positive test on Day 6 **must** be given a KN95 mask if they do not already have one. A KN95 mask (or higher) must be worn by the staff member from Days 6 through 10.

What Types of Face Coverings Are Not Permitted on DOE Property?

- Bandanas and neck gaiters are not permitted.
- Face coverings with an exhalation valve or vent are not permitted as exhalation valves allow unfiltered exhaled air to escape to others.
- Face coverings that completely cover or hide an individual's face, such as ski masks, are not permitted.
- Unless otherwise approved by school administration, clear face shields cannot be worn unless accompanied by a face covering.

Face Covering Storage and Disposal

Proper removal and disposal of face coverings is important to everyone's health. Before removing a face covering, you must wash hands and then remove the face covering by its straps. It is important to note:

- Single-use face coverings must be thrown away after use.

- A reusable face covering should be stored with the outer surface folded inward and against itself to reduce contact with other surfaces.
 - Reusable face coverings can be stored between uses in a clean, sealable paper bag or breathable container.
 - Reusable face coverings must be washed regularly.
- Hands should be washed or sanitized after touching a used face covering.

Breaks from Wearing a Face Covering for All Students

- Students must be allowed to remove their face coverings when eating or drinking.
- For safety reasons, face coverings should never be worn by 3-K and Pre-K students during nap/rest time. For additional information on face coverings for 3-K and Pre-K students, please refer to Policy Guidance for Daily Routines in Early Childhood Classrooms .
- Students who request to remove their face covering must be permitted to for a short period of time. These “mask breaks” can also be offered throughout the day, at a school’s discretion. The frequency of mask breaks may vary by grade level within a school.
 - Mask breaks should not last for more than five minutes.
 - Mask breaks can only occur when:
 - Students are outdoors or well-ventilated areas.
 - Students can remain at least six feet apart.

Face Covering Lessons

In accordance with the DOE’s [School Health Policy](#) and [Bridge to School Plan](#), updated [K-12 COVID-19 Health and Safety Lessons](#)([Open external link](#)) are available to help students make informed decisions and adopt behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19. The lessons are optional but recommended as part of comprehensive Health Education instruction; they can be taught by any teacher. Each grade level includes a lesson around wearing a face covering.

Elementary:

- [Grades K-2 Lessons](#)([Open external link](#))
- [Grades 3-5 Lessons](#)([Open external link](#))

Secondary:

- [Grades 6-8 Lessons](#)(Open external link)
- [Grades 9-12 Lessons](#)(Open external link)

Face Covering for Staff Supporting Students with Significant Needs

Including but not limited to Students served by District 75

Adults may not always be able to maintain physical distance from students, especially when:

- Supporting students with feeding and/or ambulation
- Assisting students with clothing changes
- Supporting students with toileting
- Providing certain interventions during a related service
- Supporting students who display behaviors that increase risk of disease transmission (e.g., touching, spitting, lack of bodily awareness)

In such situations, the adult must wear a [well-fitting face covering](#)([Open external link](#)), regardless of the adult's COVID-19 vaccination status. If available KN95 respirators are recommended for the above activities. It is strongly recommended that the adult also wear a face shield when physical distance from a student cannot be consistently maintained. If an adult is supporting a student (over the age of 2) who cannot wear a face covering, the adult must wear a face shield in addition to a face covering. Adults must wear gloves when assisting students with toileting/diaper changes. Glove use is also strongly recommended when assisting with feeding or otherwise coming into contact with a student's skin or secretions.

If the adult touches their face or needs to remove their mask momentarily for any reason, they must increase the distance between themselves and the student to at least six feet and sanitize hands before returning to close contact with the student.

In addition, staff may use alternate PPE (e.g., coverings that are transparent at or around the mouth) for therapies or interventions that require visualization

of the movement of the lips and/or mouths (e.g., speech therapy) or as needed when supporting certain students (e.g., students with hearing impairments) who benefit from being able to see more of the adult's face.

Face shields and gloves will be made available upon request to any adult performing the above activities.

Face Coverings on School Buses

All students, drivers, and attendants are required to wear face coverings on the bus, except if approved for a medical exemption. See below for more information on a medical exemption. If a student does not have a face covering, the bus driver will distribute one.

Students with a medical exemption will not be required to wear a face covering on the bus, but must maintain at least six feet of physical distance from the driver or other passengers on the bus to the greatest extent possible.

Students without a medical exemption but who need support because they struggle with wearing a face covering due to a documented medical, social-emotional, or developmental impairment:

- Will be reminded to wear the face covering,
- Will be permitted to have mask breaks, as defined above,
- Must remain physically distant from the other passengers.

The attendant must remind students to wear the face covering if they remove it. Face covering breaks may be allowed for brief periods as necessary.

Supports for Children in Early Childhood Programs (3-K and Pre-K)

- As with any behavior changes in early childhood, children and families should be supported in a positive and developmentally appropriate way to change their behavior regarding face coverings in their program environment. Teachers in 3-K and Pre-K classes can incorporate a wide

variety of strategies to introduce children and families to this expectation, which may be accomplished over time. This situation should be approached with empathy toward the family and child taking into consideration their cultural and linguistic needs. Reassure families and children that this is being done to ensure that everyone is safe and healthy. The Division of Early Childhood (DECE) will support teaching teams and families in introducing and reinforcing this expectation.

- It is important that this expectation not lead to conflict between or among children and teaching staff. Children who refuse to wear a face covering, are crying, or are dysregulated may be experiencing mental distress. In these cases, teaching staff and families should use positive, nurturing strategies to prevent conflicts over face coverings, and encourage the child to consistently use a face covering over time.
- Children in early childhood programs should not be isolated, suspended or expelled for not wearing a face covering. For children who need additional support acclimating to the face covering requirement, schools must create and implement a positive behavior intervention plan that supports a child towards consistently wearing a face covering. Please see the [Positive Behavior Planning for Young Children Wearing Face Coverings document](#)([Open external link](#)) for a detailed guide to positive behavior supports and planning regarding face coverings.
- The positive behavior intervention plan should include the following:
 - A detailed behavior plan whose duration is at least one month in length that includes some milestones for successful integration of the face covering for the child,
 - The different positive behavior approaches and strategies that will be taken with the child,
 - A communication and support plan with the family,
 - Principals may reach out to DECEMHW@schools.nyc.gov for support to develop the positive behavior plan and may also consult the school nurse on the development of the plan.

Supporting Students with Wearing a Face Covering

Students who do not comply with the face covering requirement for reasons not based on a documented medical impairment must be supported by their school community to meet compliance.

Students with Disabilities

For a student with a significant disability that limits their tolerance for wearing a face covering, schools should provide additional support, as described below. This support should be provided based on the school's experience with the student, knowledge of the student's needs (for example, if the student's disability, as documented on the student's Individualized Education Program or Section 504 Plan is the cause for the student's inability to tolerate a face covering), and considering any additional documentation or information shared by the parent/ guardian:

1. Inform the parent/ guardian that the expectation is for students to wear face coverings throughout the school day as much as possible—with provided mask breaks—and that students will receive training and instruction on increasing their tolerance of wearing face coverings.
2. Provide a face covering upon entry to school and instruct students on how to wear it.
3. If a student removes the face covering, the student should be reminded to wear the face covering. If a student is unable to wear their face covering, the student should be given a mask break, which may take place indoors in a well-ventilated area, while ensuring that other students maintain at least six feet of distance. The mask break can last longer than five minutes at the discretion of the teacher or provider, as appropriate for the student's needs.

Students with significant disabilities that limit their tolerance for wearing a face covering are not subject to the use of the disciplinary measures outlined below in the “Repeated Refusal to Wear a Face Covering” section.

All Students

In addition to the proactive approaches described above, school staff may use the following strategies, among others, to support students in consistently wearing a face covering.

1. Have an adult/ teacher in the school building speak with the student to address the importance of wearing a face covering during the school day.
2. Should the student still refuse to wear a face covering, the teacher must immediately engage the school counselor and/or social worker; the school counselor/ social worker must immediately meet with the student and contact the parent/ guardian to discuss concerns.
3. Should the student still refuse to wear a face covering, the school counselor/ social worker must immediately notify the school administration; a school administrator must immediately meet with the student to discuss the importance of wearing a face covering.

Considerations prior to imposing any disciplinary response for a student with a disability:

1. If the student has a disability, the school counselor/ social worker must discuss the situation with a representative of the school who is knowledgeable about the student and the interpretation of information about the student's behavior to consider whether the student's disability or failure to implement the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan is impacting the student's ability to wear a face covering.
2. If the school determines that the failure to wear a face covering was caused by or directly related to the student's disability, or the school's failure to implement the IEP or 504 plan, the student must be allowed to remain in class and no disciplinary removal or suspensions may be imposed. Additional supports will be provided to encourage the student to tolerate wearing the face covering. Staff supporting the student should follow the guidance in the appendix regarding additional PPE.
3. If the school determines that the student's mask compliance is not caused by or directly related to the student's disability, or the failure of the school to implement the IEP or 504 plan, the following disciplinary steps may be taken, consistent with the additional protections noted below.

Repeated Refusal to Wear a Face Covering

Ensuring that every child learns in a safe, supportive, and affirming school is our top priority. To do this, we use preventive approaches that address the root cause of trauma, as well as reinforcing positive behaviors through

teachable moments. Research has shown that students facing disciplinary measures, and the schools they attend, are better served by providing positive supports that teach students the social, emotional, and behavioral skills necessary to learn and thrive.

This policy guidance is only applicable in cases where there is egregious noncompliance and the student is refusing to wear a face covering, despite ongoing documented supports. For health and safety reasons during the COVID-19 pandemic, if a student repeatedly refuses to wear a face covering, and all the strategies above have been attempted, schools may take the following steps, depending on the student's grade level.

1. The school should contact the student's parent/ guardian for pick-up. The school must provide classwork and homework for the student to complete (and/or asynchronous remote instruction), as appropriate. This incident must be documented in OORS using the infraction codes further explained below.
2. The student should wait for pick-up in a well-ventilated designated area not currently in use when practicable, such as an empty conference room, the cafeteria, or a safe, enclosed outdoor space, such as an internal courtyard.
 - o The school administration, in consultation with the BRT, will designate an appropriate staff member who should use additional PPE, such as wearing a KN-95 mask and a face shield, and wait with the student in a well-ventilated area until they are picked up (physical distance of 6 or more feet should be maintained).
3. The school must follow up with the student's parent/ guardian and reiterate the importance of wearing a face covering while in school.

Grades K Through 3

The school must record every incident of a student not complying with the face covering mandate in OORS under infraction code A22 clearly stating in the description "mask non-compliance." The school should hold a meeting with the student's parent/ guardian to discuss how to utilize positive,

nurturing strategies to encourage the student to consistently use a face covering over time.

Note that the disciplinary options for the A22 infraction, as outlined in the [Discipline Code](#),(Open external link) for grades K-3 do not include a suspension. Therefore, in order to honor and protect the health and safety of individuals at the school during the COVID-19 pandemic, students in grades K-3 will be sent home each day they refuse to wear a face covering.

- In these cases, the student’s parent/ guardian can be called for pick-up, and the school must provide classwork and homework for the student to complete (and/or asynchronous remote instruction), as appropriate.
- The school must record in SOHO a teacher removal each day a student is sent home for refusal to wear a face covering. For additional information about applicable procedures, schools should refer to the [Overview of Teacher Removals and Suspensions](#)(Open external link).

This process will be carefully monitored by the Office of Safety and Youth Development and Superintendent teams to ensure appropriate support for our youngest learners, and ensuring an MDR, where needed.

Grades 4 and 5

The school must record every incident of a student not complying with the face covering mandate in OORS under infraction code A22 clearly stating in the description “mask non-compliance.”

In order to honor and protect the health and safety of individuals at the school during the COVID-19 pandemic, if the student still does not comply after the school implements supports, the parent/ guardian will be called to pick up the student, and the school must record the incident as a teacher removal in SOHO stating the reason for removal is mask non-compliance under infraction code A22. The school must provide classwork and homework for the student to complete (i.e., asynchronous remote instruction).

Principal’s Suspension for Grades 4 and 5:

Suspension should be considered only when absolutely necessary and in consultation with your superintendent.

After multiple teacher removal incidents of having a parent/ guardian pick up the student for refusal to wear a face covering, the school may impose a principal's suspension for up to five school days. In order to honor and protect the health and safety of individuals at the school during the COVID-19 pandemic, a principal's suspension due to non-compliance with a face covering will be served outside of the school building (e.g., student's place of residence).

- The school must record the incident of a student not complying with the face covering mandate in OORS under infraction code A22.
- The principal's suspension must be requested in SOHO, to be reviewed by the Office of Safety and Youth Development.
- The principal must have a conference with the student and parent/ guardian.
- The school will provide the student with alternative instruction, including classwork, homework, and asynchronous remote instruction, for the duration of the suspension.
- The suspension can end early if the student commits to wearing a face covering. The SOHO case profile must be updated to reflect the actual number of days served.
- For additional information about applicable procedures, including a principal's conference with the parent, schools should refer to the [Overview of Teacher Removals and Suspensions\(Open external link\)](#).

Note: If the student commits to wearing a face covering, the suspension can end early. The student should be welcomed back with a restorative meeting.

Superintendent's Suspension for Grades 4 and 5:

Suspension should be considered only when absolutely necessary and in consultation with your superintendent.

If there are multiple additional incidents of non-compliance by the student after a prior principal's suspension, the school may record it under

infraction code A43. (Note that A43 cannot be used for a principal's suspension for non-compliance with wearing a face covering; schools must use A22.)

In order to honor and protect the health and safety of individuals at the school during the COVID-19 pandemic, the school may request a superintendent's suspension for up to 10 school days. Pending the hearing and for the duration of any suspension, the school must provide the student with classwork, homework, and remote asynchronous instruction.

- Schools must document the superintendent's suspension request in SOHO.
- The suspension can end early if the student commits to wearing a face covering. The SOHO case profile must be updated to reflect the actual number of days served.
- For additional information about applicable procedures, including a principal's conference with the parent, schools should refer to the [Overview of Teacher Removals and Suspensions\(Open external link\)](#).

Note: If the student commits to wearing a face covering, the suspension can end early. The student should be welcomed back with a restorative meeting.

Grades 6 Through 12

The school must record every incident of a student not complying with the face-covering mandate in OORS under infraction code B21 clearly stating in the description "mask non-compliance." In order to honor and protect the health and safety of individuals at the school during the COVID-19 pandemic, if the student still does not comply after the school implements supports, the parent/ guardian will be called to pick up the student, the school must record the incident as a teacher removal in SOHO stating the reason for removal is mask non-compliance under infraction code B21. The school must provide classwork, homework, and asynchronous remote instruction.

Principal's Suspension for Grades 6 through 12:

Suspension should be considered only when absolutely necessary and in consultation with your superintendent.

After multiple teacher removal incidents of having a parent/ guardian pick up the student for refusal to wear a face covering, the school may impose a principal's suspension for up to five school days. In order to honor and protect the health and safety of individuals at the school during the COVID-19 pandemic, a principal's suspension due to non-compliance with a face covering will be served outside of the school building (e.g., student's place of residence).

- The school must record the incident of a student not complying with the face covering mandate in OORS under infraction code B21.
- The principal's suspension must be requested in SOHO to be reviewed by the Office of Safety and Youth Development.
- The principal must have a conference with the student and parent/ guardian.
- The school will provide the student with alternative instruction, including classwork, homework, and asynchronous remote instruction.
- The suspension can end early if the student commits to wearing a face covering. The SOHO case profile must be updated to reflect the actual number of days served.
- For additional information about applicable procedures, including a principal's conference with the parent, schools should refer to the [Overview of Teacher Removals and Suspensions](#)(Open external link).

Note: If the student commits to wearing a face covering, the suspension can end early. The student should be welcomed back with a restorative meeting.

Superintendent's Suspension Grades 6 through 12:

Suspension should be considered only when absolutely necessary and in consultation with your superintendent.

If there are multiple additional incidents of non-compliance by the student after a prior principal's suspension, the school may record it under infraction

code B45. (Note that B45 cannot be used for a principal's suspension for non-compliance with wearing a face covering; schools must use B21.)

In order to honor and protect the health and safety of individuals at the school during the COVID-19 pandemic, the school may request a superintendent's suspension for up to 10 school days. Pending the hearing and for the duration of any suspension, the school must provide the student with classwork, homework, and remote asynchronous instruction.

- Schools must document the superintendent's suspension in SOHO.
- The suspension can end early if the student commits to wearing a face covering. The SOHO case profile must be updated to reflect the actual number of days served.
- For additional information about applicable procedures, including a principal's conference with the parent, schools should refer to the [Overview of Teacher Removals and Suspensions](#)(Open external link).

Note: If the student commits to wearing a face covering, the suspension can end early. The student should be welcomed back with a restorative meeting.

Additional Protections for Students with Disabilities and Students Suspected of Having a Disability

If the imposition of a teacher's removal or suspension will result in a student being suspended for more than 10 consecutive school days or more than 10 cumulative school days as a result of a pattern of removals, an MDR must be held.

In order to help schools determine whether the imposition of a suspension or removal would result in a pattern of removals, SOHO prompts schools to make a pattern determination. Where the combination of removals and/or suspensions is due to failure to comply with the face covering requirement, and exceeds 10 school days in a school year, you must follow the prompts in SOHO to confirm that a pattern exists and an MDR must be conducted.

If the MDR determination is that the failure to wear the mask was caused by or has a direct and substantial relationship to the student's disability or failure to implement the IEP, the removal or suspension may not be imposed. If a student is removed from school (removals and/or suspensions) in excess of 10 cumulative school days, a suspension plan must be developed to identify the program and services that will be provided during the suspension period in order for the student to continue to make progress towards the goals on their IEP and participate in the general education curriculum.

Students with IEPs must be provided with appropriate special education services that allow the student to make progress toward the student's IEP goals.

Attendance

Schools should follow the same protocols for "student in quarantine" to capture attendance for students facing disciplinary action due to mask non-compliance. Please review the current [attendance policy](#).

Appendix

Medical Mask Exemptions for Students

The following sets forth the procedures for parents seeking a face covering exemption for their child for medical reasons only:

- Parent must submit documentation from a doctor or other health care provider specifically documenting the medical condition and why the student's condition makes the student unable to wear or tolerate a face covering.
- The school administration will forward the request to the school's Health Director who will review the request and supporting documentation and may approve the exemption based on such documentation.
- Health Directors with questions about a request or documentation or in need of consultation regarding a request can contact the Office of School Health by emailing aharbaja@health.nyc.gov (Open external link) or calling 917-628-5776 or 718-310-2918.
- Emails with any medical or healthcare documentation must be encrypted.

- Students must be permitted to attend school while requests are reviewed. During the review, the school should provide additional adherence support and additional breaks, explore the use of alternative PPE, and ensure other risk mitigation strategies such as handwashing and physical distancing are adhered to.
- If the exemption request is approved, schools must notify OPT if the student takes a bus to/from school by contacting Jodi Sammons Chen at jsammons@schools.nyc.gov (Open external link).
- The school must advise the parent of the outcome of the review.

Students with face covering exemptions must continue to adhere to other health and safety requirements, including hand hygiene and physical distancing requirements. Staff working with students with a face covering exemption will be provided with additional PPE.

Face Covering for Staff Supporting Students with Significant Needs, Including but Not Limited to Students Served by District 75

Adults may not always be able to maintain physical distance from students, especially when:

- Supporting students with feeding and/or ambulation
- Assisting students with clothing changes
- Supporting students with toileting
- Providing certain interventions during a related service
- Supporting students who display behaviors that increase risk of disease transmission (e.g., touching, spitting, lack of bodily awareness)

In such situations, the adult must wear a well-fitting face covering, regardless of the adult's COVID-19 vaccination status. If available, KN95 masks are recommended for the above activities. It is strongly recommended that the adult also wear a face shield when physical distance from a student cannot be consistently maintained. If an adult is supporting a student over the age of two who cannot wear a face covering, the adult must wear a face shield in addition to a face covering. Adults must wear gloves when assisting students with toileting/diaper changes. Glove use is also strongly recommended when assisting with feeding or otherwise coming into contact with a student's skin or secretions.

If the adult touches their face or needs to remove their mask momentarily for any reason, they must increase the distance between themselves and the student to at least six feet and sanitize hands before returning to close contact with the student.

In addition, staff may use alternate PPE (e.g., coverings that are transparent at or around the mouth) for therapies or interventions that require visualization of the movement of the lips and/or mouths (e.g., speech therapy) or as needed when supporting certain students (e.g., students with hearing impairments) who benefit from being able to see more of the adult's face.

Face shields and gloves will be made available upon request to any adult performing the above.

School Year 2021-22

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