



Indiana State Department of Health

COVID-19 Planning for Schools and Local Health Departments: Frequently Asked Questions

Masks and PPE in schools

I see that it's not recommended that the nurse wear an N95 when providing direct patient care for a symptomatic student and this nurse will be in close contact with this sick student for >15 mins. Is this because it's truly not needed or because there is a lack of supply?

Surgical masks provide adequate protection unless aerosolizing procedure is being done. In those instances, an N95 should be worn.

Are you hearing about schools not requiring masks?

Governor Holcomb's executive orders require masks be worn by individuals age 8 and older or when on the school bus, with some exceptions. You can find the order [here](#). Masks are recommended for those age 2 and older.

Our health officer wants masks to be required for riding the bus. It is difficult to distance due to the number of students and confined space. The schools do not want to make this a requirement. Some of our students are on the bus for over an hour one way.

The Governor's Executive Order requires masks be worn by individuals age 8 and older, with some exceptions. You can find the order [here](#). Masks are recommended for those age 2 and over. The bus is a prime example of when to wear a mask. Wearing a mask is one of the best ways to control spread, along with handwashing, social distancing and staying home if you're ill.

Should kids have spare masks at school? For the elementary kids who drop it on the floor, etc.?

If they have access to an extra mask, absolutely, but use what they have. A dusty mask is better than no mask.

What do you recommend for parents/students who refuse to wear masks? Should face shields be an option for students who refuse to wear a mask?

Face shields are not as good an option as face masks. We encourage anyone who does not have a health-related reason for not wearing a mask to start slowly to get accustomed to it.

If cloth masks are worn, can you forgo social distancing all day in the school setting? What type of risk would this be considered if yes or if schools do this regardless of the recommendation of the CDC?

While cloth masks can decrease the risk of spread, individuals who are within 6 feet of a positive case for 15 minutes or longer are considered close contacts and would be subject to quarantine, even if they are wearing a mask. Masks do not remove the distance requirement for a close contact, but can significantly lower the risk of infection.

What should students do with their masks during recess? What would you recommend for students to do with their mask while not wearing it? Elementary kids especially.

One option is for students to place their masks on a peg in the hallway as the students head outside. Another option is to store them in a plastic [container](#) or paper [bag](#) with their name on it. A video showing this option is available here. Students shouldn't put masks in their pockets. We are working in partnership with the Governor's office on some short videos geared toward answering some of your questions and providing education to the students. Another suggestion is a peg system prior to leaving the school for recess, lanyard with clip or badge clip to keep mask on the student. However, if a lanyard is to be used on the playground, it should be breakaway to avoid a choking hazard if the lanyard is caught on the equipment.

Do students have to constantly wear face masks? When can they remove them? Can they sit on the student's desk? Is it OK for the student to handle the mask multiple times during the day to take it off and on?

Students are encouraged to wear face masks throughout the day, with exceptions for lunch and situations in which they can socially distance, are outdoors or are in PE class. However, if all the students are facing the same direction and are socially distanced, then taking them off during class to have a break from wearing them could be considered. Also, younger students who are in class and all the desks are facing forward while they are seated at their desks may be allowed to take their mask off while they read, do paperwork or receive instruction. The goal is to achieve six feet of social distance, but it is acceptable to remove masks when students are at least three feet apart and facing the same direction. Another option may be to take mask breaks, such as having half the class take a five-minute break, then the other half take a five-minute break, if students are facing the same direction and at least three feet apart.

Our school district has decided to follow guidance from our local health department on wearing masks during the school day while moving and when social distance cannot be obtained. In our discussions with them it also included recess. Since we all know that elementary students most likely will not comply while playing, masks will need to be worn at recess to comply with their guidance. The only guidance I can find on heat index and warnings is that sports should not practice if the heat index reaches 104 F. This seems very high if you are wearing a mask. I already have students that come in with

heat exhaustion with a lower heat index and not wearing a mask. What is your opinion on wearing a mask during recess, and a safe heat index?

If students are outside and able to get some much-needed fresh air, masks can be removed. Check with your county or district regarding guidelines for when it is too hot to go outside and follow that if possible.

What about valve masks for students/staff?

They are not recommended, as they are one-way valves and do not protect others when breathing out.

The school is requiring masks. A student has had COVID-19. IF I can provide a doctor's note and a positive test result, can my child opt out of wearing a mask since he is not at risk to anyone nor can he get it again?

It is unknown whether your student can contract COVID-19 again. The student should wear a mask.

If students are 4 feet from one another and all facing the same way, can they go without a mask?

The Governor's Executive Order [here](#) addresses masks in schools and times when masks can be removed. We recognize that schools may not be able to achieve 6 feet of distance and urge 3-6 feet, but close contacts will be anyone within 6 feet of a positive case.

What is your recommendation for PPE worn in the school nurse clinic? Are masks or face coverings sufficient or should the nurses/ assistants wear N95 masks? Face shields? Goggles? Should we wear scrubs during the workday and change clothes before leaving our clinics?

Nurses should wear a surgical-grade mask but do not need an N95 unless they are administering a nebulizer or another aerosol-generating procedure, which is not recommended. Gloves should be changed between students and hands sanitized or washed. Scrubs that are bagged before leaving school and promptly washed upon arrival at home are recommended. Washable gowns are also recommended. Face shields and goggles can provide additional protection but are not required.

KN95s are NOT the same as N95s and should not be worn for aerosolizing respiratory treatments or any situation that warrants a N95 mask

How will schools handle depleted PPE supplies?

We encourage you to work with your local healthcare partners to coordinate purchases of PPE. You can also access the PPE directory of vendors for supplies at <https://backontrack.in.gov/ppedirectory.htm>

You mentioned that students being outside for PE would certainly be a situation where students can take the masks off. Can we assume that also applies to outdoor athletic practices and events?

Yes, but we encourage social distancing, disinfecting and frequent handwashing and emphasize the importance of avoiding touching your face. Classes held outside would also apply.
