



Indiana State Department of Health

Back to School Resources, School FAQs Masks and PPE in schools

MASKS

Q: Are you hearing about schools not requiring masks?

A: Gov. Holcomb's executive orders require all students in grades 3-12 in any public or private school building, facility or grounds to wear face masks or face shields, with some exemptions. This also applies to all faculty, staff, vendors, contractors, volunteers and visitors (except for visiting children 2-8). Anyone on a school bus, regardless of age, must wear a face covering. You can read more in the [order](#) (start on page 8). Masks are recommended for those 2 and older, but children younger than 2 should not wear masks due to the risk of suffocation.

Q: Our health officer wants to require masks to ride the bus, but the schools don't want to; some students have a one-hour ride each way.

A: The governor's executive [order](#) requires anyone on a school bus, regardless of age, to wear a face covering. The bus is a prime example of when to wear a mask, as it's one of the best ways to control COVID-19's spread, along with good hand hygiene, physical distancing and staying home if you're ill.

Q: Should kids have spare masks at school, especially for the elementary kids who drop them on the floor, etc.?

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

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

A: Face shields are not as good an option as face masks. Unless you have a health-related reason not to wear a mask, we encourage you to start slowly getting accustomed to one.

Q: If cloth masks are worn, can you forgo social distancing all day in school? What's the risk if a school does this, even though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends it?

A: While cloth masks can decrease the risk of spread, individuals within 6 feet of a positive case for a total of more than 15 minutes in a 24-hour period are considered close contacts and would

be subject to quarantine, even if they are wearing a mask. Masks do not eliminate the distance requirement for a close contact but can significantly lower the risk of infection.

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

A: In a classroom or place of instruction, if all students can keep at least 3 feet of social distance from one another at all times, and students are seated facing in the same direction, students don't need to wear face coverings or face shields during instruction. Teachers must wear face coverings or face shields if they can't maintain 6 feet of social distance from students. [You can read more](#) in the governor's executive order, which has been continued. It also addresses 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, regardless of wearing a face covering.

Q: 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 when putting it on and taking it off?

A: Students are encouraged to wear face masks throughout the day, with exceptions for lunch and situations in which they can physically distance, and when they are outside or in physical education (PE) class. However, if all students are facing the same direction and are socially distanced, consider having students take their masks off during class to get a break from wearing them.

Also, younger students who are in class with all the desks facing forward while students are seated may take their masks off while reading, doing paperwork or receiving instruction. The goal is to achieve 6 feet of physical distance, but it's acceptable to remove masks when students are at least 3 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 3 feet apart. As far as students handling their masks many times a day, they should wash or sanitize their hands before putting a mask on or taking it off, after touching their mask and after storing it.

Q: What's your opinion about wearing a face mask during recess, and what's a safe heat index for wearing a mask?

A: 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.

Q: What should students do with their masks during recess? What would you recommend students do with their mask while not wearing them? Elementary kids, especially.

A: One option is for students to place their masks on hallway pegs as they head outside for recess. Another suggestion is a lanyard with clip or badge clip to keep the mask on the student. However, if a lanyard is used on the playground, it should be breakaway to avoid a choking hazard if the lanyard catches on equipment.

Masks also can be stored in a plastic container ([watch a video](#)) or paper bag ([watch a video](#)) with a student's name on it. And you can [view a graphic with tips](#) on putting on and taking off your mask, plus storing it. Students shouldn't put masks in their pockets.

More on masks is available here:

- [Mask information](#)
- [How to wear cloth face coverings](#)
- [Wear your mask correctly](#)

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

A: Yes, but we encourage physical distancing, disinfecting and frequent handwashing and emphasize the importance of avoiding touching your face. This also applies to classes held outside.

Q: What about valve masks for students/staff?

A: They are not recommended, as they are one-way valves that can let expelled respiratory droplets reach others.

Q: The school is requiring masks. My child's 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 because he's not at risk to anyone nor can he get it again?

A: Because it's unknown whether your child can contract COVID-19 again, he should wear a mask.

PPE

Q: I see that it's not recommended for a nurse to wear an N95 respirator when providing direct patient care for a symptomatic student, even when the nurse will be closer than 6 feet for a total of more than 15 minutes in a 24-hour period. Is this because it's truly not needed or because of shortages?

A: Surgical masks provide adequate protection unless the nurse is performing aerosolizing procedures, which are not recommended. However, if they are unavoidable, an N95 should be worn.

Q: Should we wear scrubs during the workday and change clothes before leaving our clinics?

A: Scrubs should be bagged before leaving school and promptly washed upon arriving home. Washable gowns are also recommended. Face shields and goggles can provide additional protection but are not required.

NOTE: KN95s are NOT the same as N95s and should not be worn for aerosolizing respiratory treatments or any other situation that warrants an N95 mask.

Q: How will schools handle depleted PPE supplies?

A: We encourage you to work with your local healthcare partners to coordinate purchases of PPE. You can also access the [Indiana PPE Directory](#), which lists vendors vetted by the Indiana Economic Development Corp.
