Cloth Face Coverings in Schools

Frequently Asked Questions and Considerations for Use

A cloth face covering is material that covers the nose and mouth while being secured to the head with ties, straps, or simply wrapped around the lower face. These coverings can be made with a variety of materials. This document provides answers to some basic questions on use and cleaning of cloth face coverings, and questions that school administrators should consider when implementing COVID-19 related policies or procedures. The **CDC** and **DHS** offer additional information on cloth face coverings and how to properly wear one.

Who should wear cloth face coverings?

All students and staff who are able to properly and safely wear and remove a cloth face covering should wear one. School staff and administrators should work with their local and tribal health department to ensure that school cloth face covering policies align with any applicable state and local rules and recommendations. There are valid concerns that may prevent an individual from wearing one safely. Cloth face coverings should NOT be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the covering without assistance. Medical considerations, including sensory concerns and respiratory conditions, mean some individuals are not able to wear a face covering safely. Wearing a cloth face covering may be dangerous or stressful for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

What is the rationale behind using the cloth face coverings?

Research on cloth face covers is evolving, but current recommendations support wearing cloth face coverings in public places where you are not able to stay at least 6 feet away from others. Face coverings help reduce the chance that you will spread the disease to others if you are asymptomatic or do not realize you are sick. Cloth face coverings help to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air if the wearer speaks, coughs, or sneezes. It is important to note that cloth face coverings are not personal protective equipment and do NOT prevent the wearer from exposure to infectious particles, especially if in close contact with an infected person or if the person is not wearing their own mask. Cloth face coverings are not a replacement for other preventive measures. Even when wearing one, physical distancing should be maintained to the extent possible and proper hand hygiene and cough etiquette should be used/encouraged.

How do you wear a cloth face covering?

A cloth face covering should cover the wearer's nose and mouth, fit snugly on their face, and secure in place. The wearer should avoid touching the cloth face covering, especially if hands have not been washed recently.

How many cloth face coverings does one person need? And when do you need to change a cloth face covering?

It is recommended that individuals have access to multiple cloth face coverings. The same cloth face covering should not be worn for longer than a single day to allow for adequate cleaning. If the cloth face covering becomes soiled or damaged, more frequent changing is advised. Availability of multiple face coverings for staff and students at all times may be needed. The possibility of cloth face coverings becoming soiled or damaged should be considered as a likely scenario, especially for younger students. It is important to plan for this and work with local partners to have an adequate supply of extra face coverings for students and staff to use if theirs is lost, damaged, or soiled throughout the day. Schools should also work with their local or tribal health department and other community partners to ensure that access to multiple, affordable, or appropriate face coverings is not a prohibitive barrier for any staff or student. Schools should also create a plan to keep cloth face coverings clean and properly stored while students and staff remove cloth face coverings throughout the day during meal times or outdoor recess.

How do you wash a cloth face covering? If you don't have regular access to a washing machine, what is the best way to wash a cloth face covering?

It's a good idea to wash your cloth face covering frequently, ideally daily. Store them in a designated bag or bin until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. If you are unable to machine wash/dry the cloth face covering, wash it by hand with laundry detergent and hot water before air drying. Re-wearing a cloth face covering without washing it is not advised, but if this is unavoidable, be sure to wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. Schools should advise families and staff on how frequently to wash cloth face coverings and provide support and resources for families and staff who may struggle to do so easily. For example, if a school has access to laundry services, it may consider offering a program to help families and staff wash cloth face coverings. A school could ask families or staff to store cloth face

coverings in a mesh laundering bag for drop off on Fridays at a designated area. The school staff could launder the masks appropriately over the weekend and return them on Monday morning. If staff will be laundering worn cloth face coverings, schools should provide written safety procedures and training.

How do you care for your skin when wearing a mask regularly? Wash your face often, preferably directly before each use of the face covering, and apply moisturizer to decrease friction and reduce irritation. Wear a clean mask.

How is wearing a cloth face covering most effective?

Cloth face coverings help to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air if the wearer speaks, coughs, or sneezes. However, they are not a replacement for physical distancing and handwashing. Our best defense against COVID-19 is practicing good public health: washing our hands frequently; avoiding touching our eyes, nose, and mouth; avoiding being around sick people; and physical distancing (at least 6 feet apart) from others, especially people we don't live with.

Under Governor Evers' statewide order, when can students and staff take off their cloth face coverings during the school day?

Generally, students, staff, and any other individuals who are inside school buildings need to wear a face covering. However, individuals may take off the face covering in some situations, including:

- When eating or drinking
- While swimming
- When the individual needs to confirm his or her identity, such as when entering a secured building

Students and teachers may remove their face coverings when outside for physical education or recess. However, schools may develop policies that require students or staff to keep their face coverings on during these portions of the school day. Schools should also provide information on how to properly remove and store the face coverings while they are off.

What should districts consider when drafting their policies regarding face covering enforcement?

Districts and schools should work with staff, students, and families to establish the expectation that wearing cloth face coverings in school is the new normal.

It is important to ensure that an appropriate supply of face coverings exists to support students and staff who forget their cloth face coverings at home or do not have access to their own.

Enforcing cloth face covering policies in schools presents complex and nuanced logistical and equitable concerns. Districts and schools should consider equity in the implementation and enforcement of any face covering policies to ensure that measures are assessed to minimize potential for discriminatory implementation. Punitive measures are not recommended; rather, school administrators and staff are encouraged to work with individuals (and families) to address concerns or barriers around wearing a face covering. For example, staff should discuss with students or families the reasons for wearing face coverings, work with them to address fit or comfort issues (such as twisting ear loops to fit more comfortably on smaller faces), and address accessibility issues. For those students or staff who are unable to wear a face covering for medical or psychological reasons, school districts are encouraged to make accommodations per requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If an individual or family of a student is unwilling to comply, schools may consider working with that family to make use of a virtual learning opportunity as an alternative.

Schools should work closely with families and staff on methods for modeling and normalizing wearing face coverings and may consider providing information resources or trainings to help adults work with students to feel more comfortable with face coverings. Part of this education should be discussing with students that it is not their job to police other students for wearing or not wearing a face covering. Only school administrators, staff, or other trusted adults should be discussing the wearing or not wearing of a face covering with a student. Students should be instructed to assume that if someone is not wearing a face covering, they are doing so for a legitimate reason; it is important to stress with students that some reasons may not be as obvious as a visible or known medical condition (such as mental health concerns or previous traumatic experiences) and to stress the importance of privacy and the sensitivity of some of these matters. School staff may ask if someone is not wearing a cloth face covering due to disability, medical, or mental health condition. Schools may discuss alternative accommodations in the classroom and buildings for individuals who are exempt from wearing a face coverings.

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS TO CONSIDER CONCERNING CLOTH FACE COVERINGS

- 1. What will the policy or expectation wearing cloth face coverings for staff and students be even without a legal order?
- 2. How and when will these policies be reevaluated and potentially changed?
- 3. If wearing cloth face coverings is the expectation, how will exceptions concerning medical concerns, including traumatic personal experiences, autism spectrum disorder, physical disability, or severe mental illness be granted? What measures will be taken to protect other students and staff who will need to interact with individuals who cannot wear a cloth face covering?
- 4. How will staff explain exceptions to the student body?
- 5. How will staff address bullying concerning cloth face coverings, either due to their use, their design, or their origin (school-provided vs. purchased by families)? It is important to assess any enforcement or plans on a case-by-case basis to avoid discrimination and ensure equity.
- **6.** How can staff prepare for potential reactions to wearing or seeing someone wear a cloth face coverings due to trauma or behavioral health concerns?
- **7.** What kind of professional development or training will be needed for staff concerning cloth face coverings?
- 8. How can staff best teach and model best practices concerning cloth face coverings?
- **9.** If wearing cloth face coverings is the expectation, how will the district address financial concerns of families if there are not enough schoolissued face coverings?