

# READY SCHOOLS, SAFE LEARNERS

## GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2020–21

### Face Coverings

Updated: March 15, 2021

For the purposes of this guidance, please refer to the following [OHA definitions](#) and specifications.

**Face coverings are required for all students in grades kindergarten and up, along with all staff.** Certain accommodations for medical needs or disability are noted in the guidance below. Student or family refusal to wear appropriate face covering for a values-based reason then dictates that educational needs be met through Comprehensive Distance Learning. Staff refusal to wear appropriate face coverings should be addressed according to established school or district processes.

In October 2020 it was established that people without symptoms can spread the virus that causes COVID-19, and this is a significant contributor to person-to-person spread. Face coverings decrease the spread of COVID-19 as “source control” of a contagious person’s respiratory secretions. Use of face coverings does not change physical distancing requirements. In addition, [evidence](#) continues to suggest that airborne transmission plays a role in the spread of COVID-19, via exposure to small droplets and aerosols that contain the virus and can linger in the air for minutes to hours. This means the virus may be able to infect people who are farther than 6 feet away from the person who is infected, especially in enclosed indoor spaces, when people are shouting, singing or exercising, and when air ventilation is suboptimal. A face covering is NOT a substitute for physical distancing. Face coverings should still be worn in addition to staying at least 6 feet apart, especially when indoors around people who don’t live in your household.

ODE, OHA, schools, families and community organizations have important roles in preparing families and care takers to prepare younger children to wear face coverings safely and effectively. This includes instruction on how to properly wear a face covering, desensitization support (getting used to wearing face coverings), recommended materials for homemade face coverings, proper care and cleaning, and how to allow for individual “face covering breaks,” *if needed, during the school day, on a very limited basis. A very limited basis is a brief break lasting no more than three to five minutes. An individual “face covering break” is intended for any single student for a very limited time to support student learning and is not formally tied to an accommodation. Any space created for a brief break should be distanced at more than six feet away from others. This kind of option is not required by RSSL but available at the discretion of educator and school leader judgment and implementation.* Lack of access to a face covering cannot be a barrier to instruction; each school has a responsibility to ensure that students have access to usable face coverings. Under ORS 339.155, school districts and public charter schools may not charge fees for the provision of face coverings to students. *Brief breaks for individual students are best when outside or a planned break, and if offered in classrooms, the break should be specific and urgent.*

In general, face coverings are preferred over face shields, as they may provide better containment of small aerosols that can be produced while talking. Use of a face shield alone should only be done on a very limited basis, because wearing a face shield alone without a mask or face covering increases the potential for transmission of viruses to those in the same room as the individual without the mask or face covering.

## What is Required?

### Required

- ❑ *Employers are required to provide masks, face coverings, or face shields for all staff, contractors, other service providers, visitors and volunteers.*
- ❑ Face coverings or face shields for all staff, contractors, other service providers, visitors or volunteers following [CDC guidelines for Face Coverings](#). *Individuals may remove their face coverings while working alone in private offices or when separated by more than 6 feet in outside learning spaces.*
- ❑ *Face coverings should be worn both indoors and outdoors, including during outdoor recess.*
- ❑ Face shields are an acceptable alternative *only* when a person has a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a mask or face covering, when people need to see mouth and tongue motions in order to communicate, or when an individual is speaking to an audience for a short period of time and clear communication is otherwise not possible.

- ❑ Face coverings or face shields for all students in grades Kindergarten and up following [CDC guidelines for Face Coverings](#). Face shields are an acceptable alternative when a student has a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a mask or face covering, or when people need to see the student’s mouth and tongue motions in order to communicate
- ❑ Face coverings should be worn both indoors and outdoors, including during outdoor recess.
- ❑ Group mask breaks” or “full classroom mask breaks” are not allowed. If a student removes a face covering, or demonstrates a need to remove the face covering for a short-period of time:
  - Provide space away from peers while the face covering is removed. In the classroom setting, an example could be a designated chair where a student can sit and take a 15 minute “sensory break;”
    - Students must not be left alone or unsupervised;
    - Designated area or chair must be appropriately distanced from other students and of a material that is easily wiped down for disinfection after each use;
  - Provide additional instructional supports to effectively wear a face covering;
  - Provide students adequate support to re-engage in safely wearing a face covering;
  - Students cannot be discriminated against or disciplined for an inability to safely wear a face covering during the school day.

Face masks for school RNs or other medical personnel when providing direct contact care and monitoring of staff/students displaying symptoms. School nurses shall also wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for their role.

- [Additional guidance](#) for nurses and health staff.

## **Accommodations under ADA or IDEA and providing FAPE while attending to Face Covering Guidance**

*Students who abstain from wearing a face covering, or students whose families determine the student will not wear a face covering during On-Site instruction must be provided access to instruction. Comprehensive Distance Learning can and should be provided when this decision is values-based. However, additional provisions do apply to students protected under ADA and IDEA.*

Please refer to the [Face Coverings and FAPE supplemental guidance](#) for additional information. ODE has developed even more detailed guidance focused on [Navigating Adaptation, Accommodation, or Modification for Student Face Covering Requirements](#).

**Staff:** Districts/schools should consult with legal counsel regarding ADA when considering restricting access for staff due to their inability to wear face coverings or face shields as required.

**Students:** Federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) protect student access to instruction. The following guidelines must be considered and employed to ensure access for students protected under ADA and IDEA.

### Required

- ❑ If any student requires an accommodation to meet the requirement for face coverings, districts and schools must limit the student's proximity to students and staff to the extent possible to minimize the possibility of exposure. Appropriate accommodations could include:
  - Offering different types of face coverings and face shields that may meet the needs of the student.
  - Spaces away from peers while the face covering is removed; students must not be left alone or unsupervised.
  - Short periods of the educational day that do not include wearing the face covering, while following the other health strategies to reduce the spread of disease.
  - Additional instructional supports to effectively wear a face covering.
- ❑ For students with existing medical conditions and a physician's orders to not wear face coverings, or other health related concerns, schools/districts **must not** deny any in-person instruction.

No disability category universally prescribes whether a student will be able to wear a face covering. However, students eligible for certain disability categories are more likely to have difficulty wearing face coverings. These include: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Other Health Impairment, Emotional Behavior Disability, Orthopedic Impairment. Schools must consider the unique needs that arise from a student's disability in determining how to appropriately support their access to FAPE.

- ❑ Schools and districts must comply with the established IEP/504 plan prior to the closure of in-person instruction in March of 2020, or the current plan in effect for the student if appropriately developed after March of 2020.

- If a student eligible for, or receiving services under a 504/IEP, **cannot** wear a face covering due to the nature of the disability, the school or district must:
  1. Review the 504/IEP to ensure access to instruction in a manner comparable to what was originally established in the student’s plan including on-site instruction with accommodations or adjustments.
  2. Not make placement determinations solely on the inability to wear a face covering.
  3. Include updates to accommodations and modifications to support students in plans.
- For students protected under ADA/IDEA, who abstain from wearing a face covering, or students whose families determine the student will not wear a face covering, the school or district must:
  1. Review the 504/IEP to ensure access to instruction in a manner comparable to what was originally established in the student’s plan.
  2. The team must determine that the disability is not prohibiting the student from meeting the requirement.
    - If the team determines that the disability is prohibiting the student from meeting the requirement, follow the requirements for students eligible for, or receiving services under, a 504/IEP who cannot wear a face covering due to the nature of the disability,
    - If a student’s 504/IEP plan included supports/goals/instruction for behavior or social emotional learning, the school team must evaluate the student’s plan prior to providing instruction through Comprehensive Distance Learning.
  3. Hold a 504/IEP meeting to determine equitable access to educational opportunities which may include limited in-person instruction, on-site instruction with accommodations, or Comprehensive Distance Learning.

- ☐ For students not currently served under an IEP or 504, districts must consider whether or not student inability to consistently wear a face covering or face shield as required is due to a disability. Ongoing inability to meet this requirement may be evidence of the need for an evaluation to determine eligibility for support under IDEA or Section 504.
- ☐ If a staff member requires an accommodation for the face covering or face shield requirements, districts and schools shall work to limit the staff member’s proximity to students and staff to the extent possible to minimize the possibility of exposure.

**Recommended**

- ⇒ If face coverings are worn, they should be washed daily or a new covering worn daily.
- ⇒ Children not yet in grade Kindergarten or up should not wear a face covering:

- If they have a medical condition that makes it difficult for them to breathe with a face covering;
- If they experience a disability that prevents them from wearing a face covering;
- If they are unable to remove the face covering independently; or
- While sleeping.

⇒ Plexiglass barriers have limited utility for schools and are not practical for classroom use. Examples of where barriers could be used include the library check-out station, cafeteria check-out, or front office. Please note, face coverings need to be worn even when staff are behind plexiglass barriers. Recommendations for barriers in non-classroom settings are as follows:

- Material: fixed, impermeable barrier
- At least 3 feet wide and 4 feet tall, centered at the level of mouth/nose level (i.e. height will depend on whether people are to be seated or standing or both).