

State Public Health Order Regarding Face Coverings in K-12 Schools - FAQ

July 17, 2020

Why are we asking our students and staff members to wear face coverings at school?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Utah Department of Health recommend the use of face masks or other face coverings to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in addition to physical distancing of a minimum of six feet when possible and regular hand washing.

We know that the virus is often spread through droplets that we expel when we breathe, talk, laugh, sing, cough or sneeze. People can have the virus and not know it because they might not feel sick. A mask prevents the accidental spread of the virus by catching droplets. [See how in this video from the National Institute of Standards and Technology.](#)

Who has the authority to mandate face coverings in schools? Is this order enforceable?

Under Utah Code §§ 26-1-30(3), (5), and (6), the Department of Health has the power and duty to promote and protect the health and wellness of the people within the state; to control the causes of epidemic, infectious, communicable, and other diseases affecting the public health; and to prevent and control communicable, infectious, acute, chronic, or any other disease or health hazard that the Department considers to be dangerous, important, or likely to affect the public health. Violation or noncompliance with a health order may be punishable as a class B misdemeanor.

Each LEA is required to develop administrator, teacher, and staff education and training on their school's reopening protocol and action plans, including compliance with the face mask order. Students can be sent home for not wearing a face covering. Existing behavior policies and procedures at all schools should be updated to reflect the circumstances and to support teachers and staff in their response to student behaviors related to mitigating the spread of Covid-19.

Who was consulted in the drafting of this order?

The Utah Department of Health drafted this order in conjunction with the Governor's Office, with input from organizations representing teachers, parents, school officials, school employees, and rural schools.

When is this order effective? For how long will it be effective?

The order is effective immediately and remains in effect until December 31, 2020. Statewide health conditions will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis, and as such, this order will be updated and may be extended.

Does this apply to all students and adults in all schools?

Yes, this order applies to all individuals while in any public or private school facility, including K-12 district, charter, and private schools, career and technical education centers, and gyms.

The Governor previously issued an Executive Order mandating face coverings in all state government facilities, including all institutions of higher education. That order continues to remain in effect for higher education.

What type of face covering is needed to comply with the order?

Face covering means a cloth mask or plastic face shield that covers both the nose and mouth. A cloth face covering is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears, or is wrapped around the lower face. A cloth face covering can be made of synthetic or natural fabrics.

Information on how to make and properly care for cloth face coverings can be found on the CDC website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>.

Will schools provide students and employees with face coverings?

It is expected that every student and employee in a school facility or on a school bus will wear a face covering. Masks may be provided through multiple means. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) procured disposable masks for each school as part of PPE health supplies in treating symptomatic students. Donations have been made to USBE by Cotopaxi and H.M. Cole to provide cloth masks for students and staff. These will be distributed by USBE. Additionally, many schools and school districts are considering purchases and gathering donations of additional face coverings for students and employees.

When is it appropriate for a student or employee to *not* wear a face covering?

This order does not apply to:

- An individual outdoors that maintains a physical distance of at least six feet from another individual;
- An individual who is eating or drinking and while maintaining a physical distance of at least six feet from another person;
- Children younger than three years of age;
- A child who cannot have a face mask placed safely on their face;
- An individual with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents the wearing a face covering;
- An individual who is deaf or hard of hearing or communicating with a individual who is deaf or hard of hearing, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication, in which case a face shield or alternative protection should be used;
- An individual who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 accommodation that would necessitate exempting the individual from wearing a face covering;
- An individual who is receiving or providing a service involving the nose or face for which temporary removal of the face covering is necessary (i.e. speech therapy); or
- An individual participating in a school sponsored activity so long as the individual complies with the Phased Guidelines for the General Public and Businesses to Maximize Public Health and Economic Reactivation pertaining to K-12 school activities. Schools may also reference guidelines provided by the Utah High School Activities Association (UHSAA)

Do students with disabilities need special accommodations related to this order?

Students with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevent them from wearing a face covering, including individuals with a medical condition for whom wearing a face covering could cause harm or obstruct breathing, or who is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance are exempt from this order. A school may require an individual to provide a medical directive verifying the need for an exemption.

A student who is deaf or hard of hearing, or an employee who is communicating with a student who is deaf or hard of hearing where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication, should utilize a face shield or alternative protection.

School districts and charters are required to systematically review all current plans (e.g., Individual Healthcare Plans, Individualized Education Program, or Section 504 plans) for accommodating students with special healthcare needs and update their care plans as needed to decrease their risk for exposure to COVID-19

Should school districts and charter schools include this in their reopening plans which are due August 1st?

Yes. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) intends to revise their Planning Requirements and Recommendations for K-12 School Reopening document to reflect this change. Local school boards and charter schools must develop plans, seek approval of those plans from their respective boards, and make those plans public prior to August 1st.

How does this apply to specific activities, such as sports, recess, or choir classes?

An individual participating in a school sponsored activity, such as athletics or recess, should comply with the Phased Guidelines for the General Public and Businesses to Maximize Public Health and Economic Reactivation pertaining to K-12 school activities (Appendix C). Additionally, schools may reference the Utah High School Activities Association's Return to Play Guidelines found here:

<https://uhsaa.org/SportsMed/UHSAA%20Return-to-Play%20Guidelines.pdf>

Currently LEAs must identify courses that would be more at risk and make plans with support from local health departments as needed to mitigate the risks. Educators assigned to these courses should look to their LEAs for guidelines and support. For example, the Utah State Board of Education recommends acknowledging choir as an inherently high-risk activity due to the increased level of respiratory output; if held, consider layering several other strategies to mitigate, including conducting in outdoor spaces, space at least six feet apart, reduce duration spent face-to-face, use of barriers, increasing airflow and ventilation.

What if parents are angry about the masking requirement?

It's important to treat everyone with dignity and respect. Even though a statewide public health order has the force of law, it's best to appeal to a person's sense of the greater good. Remind others that a mask requirement is a temporary measure while we wait for a vaccine to be developed. Masks are our medicine for now. They have the best chance of stopping the spread of droplets from one person to another and the quickest way to get back to normal.