

Updated Order of the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Requiring Universal Face Coverings

Frequently Asked Questions

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What type of mask complies with this Order?

The Order requires individuals to wear a "face covering." "Face covering" means covering of the nose and mouth with material that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is wrapped around the lower face. A "face covering" can be made of a variety of synthetic or natural fabrics, including cotton, silk or linen. A "face covering" may be factory-made, sewn by hand, or be improvised from household items, including, but not limited to, scarfs, bandanas, t-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels.

While procedural and surgical masks intended for health care providers and first responders, such as N95 respirators, meet those requirements, these specialized masks should be reserved for appropriate occupational and health care settings.

Does a disposable face shield suffice in lieu of a mask?

Wearing a cloth face covering is best. A disposable face shield is considered an alternative to a face covering and may be worn when wearing a face covering is otherwise not possible.

If I'm inside a public place and can maintain physical distancing, do I need to wear a mask?

Yes. When indoors, individuals must wear a face covering, irrespective of physical distance. If a person is working alone and does not expect to have any interaction with another person, they may remove their face covering.

Do I have to wear a mask if alone in my workplace or office?

Everyone must wear a face covering when indoors, irrespective of physical distance, however, if a person is working alone, and has no expectation of being around other persons, they do not need to do so.

Does the masking requirement apply to workers who are outdoors, and who engage in heavy physical activity, such as employees of solid waste companies and landscapers?

Yes. Individuals must wear a face covering unless working alone or working solely with individuals who are a part of their household. A list of the exceptions can be found in Section 3 of the Order.

Do I have to wear a mask both inside and outside?

The Order requires individuals to wear a face covering when indoors, irrespective of

physical distance. When outdoors, one must wear a face covering when with others who are not members of the person's household and unable to maintain sustained physical distance.

Do I need to wear a mask when around my family members or at a friend's house?

Yes. A face covering is required when indoors and around persons who are not part of the same household. For example, if you are a part of a family of four who is hosting a dinner with extended family, friends or neighbors, all attendees must wear face coverings. If having dinner with just the persons who reside in the same home as you, you do not need to wear face coverings. If outdoors and able to maintain sustained physical distance, face coverings are recommended, but not required.

When does my child have to wear a mask?

Children two years old and older are required to wear a face covering as required by the Order, unless they qualify for one of the exceptions in Section 3 of the Order. If a child is outdoors and able to consistently maintain a social distance of at least six feet from individuals who are not a part of their household, they do not need to wear a face covering.

If a parent, guardian, or responsible person is unable to place a face covering safely on the child's face, they should not do so. If a child two years old or older is unable to remove a face covering without assistance, the child is not required to wear one.

Do staff and children in childcare facilities need to wear face coverings?

All staff and children two years old and older must wear face coverings during childcare operations.

Any child who cannot wear a face covering due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition, or disability, and children who would be unable to remove a face covering without assistance, are not required to wear face coverings.

Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or who has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication, also are not required to wear a face covering. Alternative face coverings, such as plastic face shields, may also accommodate such disabilities.

Does the Order apply to children and adults while in schools?

Yes, the Order applies to all students, staff and visitors two years old and older while in school entities, including public K-12 schools, brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers (CTCs), intermediate units (IUs); educational programming for students in non-educational placements such as residential settings (boarding schools), residential facilities, detention centers, and hospital settings; PA Pre-K Counts, Head Start Programs and Preschool Early Intervention programs; Private Academic Nursery Schools and locally funded prekindergarten activities; and post-secondary institutions.

For the safety of students, staff and families and to avoid community spread of COVID-19, students and staff are considered to be members of the public who are congregating in indoor locations. As such, they are required to adhere to the Order.

Does the updated Order apply to all children?

The updated order applies to all children two years old and older.

Under what circumstances are students permitted to remove their face coverings?

School entities may allow students to remove face coverings when students are:

- Eating or drinking when spaced at least six feet apart; or
- When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task; or
- At least six feet apart during "face-covering breaks" to last no longer than 10 minutes.

Do students with disabilities need to wear face coverings?

Children two years old and older are required to wear a face covering unless they have a medical or mental health condition or disability, documented in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), that precludes the wearing of a face covering in school. Accommodations for such students should be made in partnership with the student's health care provider, school nurse, and Individual Education Plan (IEP)/Section 504 team.

May a school request evidence that someone qualifies for an exception to the Order?

Schools must require all students over 2 years of age to wear face coverings, except for any student who has a medical or mental health condition or disability that precludes the wearing of a face covering in school. Notwithstanding the exceptions in Section 3 or the Order, schools may require medical documentation. The Pennsylvania Department of Education recommends that any documentation that is provided be in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or IDEA of such medical or mental health condition or disability.

Does the Order require individuals to wear masks when participating in indoor physical activity?

Yes, a person must wear a face covering when participating in indoor physical activity where another person or persons who are not members of the individual's household are present in the same space, irrespective of physical distance. Face coverings need not be worn if the person meets one of the exceptions in Section 3 of the Order.

Does the Order apply to athletes and sports activities?

Yes. Everyone who participates in sport activities including coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear a face covering, such as a mask, unless they fall under an exception in Section 3 of the Order.

Indoors: Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings, when indoors and where another person or persons who are not members of the individual's household are present in the same space, irrespective of physical distance. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, etc.

Outdoors: Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings if they cannot maintain sustained physical distance from persons outside of their household. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc. If sustained six-foot distancing can be maintained, face coverings may be removed when outdoors.

Can employers make a "no exceptions" or a stricter face covering policy than the Commonwealth?

Yes. An employer that does so will have to review relevant state and Federal employment laws and determine that they are acting within the bounds of those laws.

Can schools make a "no exceptions" or a stricter face covering policy than the Commonwealth?

Yes, a school entity may make a stricter face covering policy. However, reasonable accommodations must be made for students, staff, employees and visitors who state they have a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that makes it unreasonable for the person to maintain a face covering.

The Order says, "Mitigate or eliminate employee, teacher, student and customer exposure to people who cannot wear or refuse to wear a face covering." What does that mean?

If a business or school has an employee, teacher, student, or customer who cannot wear a face covering, the business or school should employ additional mitigation efforts to keep their staff safe such as providing Plexiglas shields, offering services outdoors, adjusting schedules, or additional physical distancing opportunities.

Can an athlete remove their mask during play if the mask causes a medical condition, including respiratory issues that impede breathing?

Yes, the Order provides an exception in section 3 that provides that if wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or a disability. The order indicates all alternatives to wearing a face covering, including the use of a face shield, should be exhausted before an individual is excepted from this Order.

Using football as an example, wearing a mask in addition to a mouth guard and a helmet would likely create a medical issue for the athlete whether the athlete is a professional or youth player even if a previous medical issue was not present. For example, the CDC says that "wearing a mask with these types of protective equipment is not safe if it makes it hard to breathe." There are other sports where there are similar concerns that a mask would

create a medical issue where one would otherwise not exist in an athlete. For example, it should also be obvious that wearing a mask while swimming presents an imminent health issue.

According to Section 3, the athlete would be asked to work through alternatives that would reduce or eliminate the respiratory droplets that would impact others in proximity. If the sport, equipment, or exertion level does not allow for face covering to be worn safely then the athlete should not wear a face covering.

There are no exemptions for specific sports, leagues, teams, or levels. We know that some people don't like masks. We are asking everyone to please give this their best effort so we can continue these activities and others as we all unite to fight COVID-19.