

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 by 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 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?

Cloth face coverings are recommended for both students and staff who are able to wear and remove them properly. Cloth face coverings can help prevent the wearer from spreading disease if they are asymptomatic, pre-symptomatic, or do not realize they are sick.

However, 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 autism spectrum disorder and respiratory conditions, as well as traumatic personal experiences, 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 disabilities and young children. Individuals may also not be able to wear a face covering safely due to racial profiling or discrimination. Access to clean, multiple, or appropriate face coverings may also be a barrier.

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.

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 via ear loops or strings that tie behind the head. The wearer should avoid touching the cloth face covering, especially if hands have not been washed recently.

When do you need to change a cloth face covering?

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 a stockpile of extra face coverings for students and staff to use if theirs is lost, damaged, or soiled throughout the day. If face coverings will be required, it will be even more important to ensure an appropriate stockpile exists to account for situations like this.

A plan should also be created to address situations in which students and staff would remove a cloth face covering and what should be done with it (ex: during meal times/lunch).

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.

A plan should be created to address how frequently families and staff will be advised to wash cloth face coverings and provide supports 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. For instance, the school could ask families or staff to store cloth face coverings in a mesh laundering bag and have a designated area to drop them off on a Friday, 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, a written safety procedure and training will need to be implemented.

How do you care for your skin when wearing a mask regularly? (What are any concerns to look out for?)

Wash 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 with unwashed hands; avoiding being around sick people; and physical distancing (at least 6 feet apart) from others, especially people we don't live with.

Should district policy mandate cloth face coverings?

No. While mandating cloth face coverings is the most effective way to ensure that they are used by all students and staff, and students and staff utilizing the same cloth face coverings allows for uniformity and helps to reduce stigma for students or staff who may rely only on donated/free cloth face coverings, a mandate presents complex and nuanced logistical and equitable concerns. If a mandate is being considered, it is imperative that districts and schools consider the feasibility in implementation and enforcement of this policy to ensure that any punitive measures are assessed to minimize potential for discriminatory implementation. Please consider the fact that not all individuals can wear one safely and create an equitable process for addressing this safety concern. Instead of mandating cloth face coverings, working with staff and families to establish the expectation of wearing cloth face coverings with students through modeling and lessons is a more effective solution.

10 QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS TO CONSIDER CONCERNING CLOTH FACE COVERINGS

1. What will the policy or expectations be concerning wearing cloth face coverings for staff?
2. What will the policy or expectations be concerning wearing cloth face coverings for students?
3. How and when will these policies be reevaluated and potentially changed?
4. If wearing cloth face coverings is the expectation, what will exceptions look like concerning medical concerns, including traumatic personal experiences, autism spectrum disorder, physical disability, or severe mental illness?
5. If wearing cloth face coverings is the expectation, what will exceptions look like concerning fear of discrimination? How will staff explain exceptions to student body?
6. 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.
7. How can staff prepare for potential reactions to cloth face coverings due to trauma or behavioral health concerns?
8. What kind of professional development or training will there need to be for staff concerning cloth face coverings?
9. How can staff best teach and model best practices concerning cloth face coverings?
10. If wearing cloth face coverings is the expectation, how will the district address financial concerns of families if those issued are not enough?

