

UPDATED 9/6/2021

On August 31, 2021, Pennsylvania's Acting Secretary of Health signed an [Order requiring face coverings to be worn in all school entities](#), including school districts, brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers, intermediate units, and early learning and other child care settings, effective Tuesday, September 7, 2021

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has updated its FAQ page related to this order on Friday afternoon, September 3rd.

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/MaskingOrder/Pages/FAQs.aspx>

Please take a few moments to look at the FAQ's below:

What is considered 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. It can be made of a variety of synthetic or natural fabrics, including cotton, silk, or linen. Face shields are an acceptable alternative "face covering" under this new order.

Will the school have extra masks available?

Yes, we do have a quantity of masks available for students and adults. We have also ordered more masks, as we did not anticipate a universal mask order as most of you.

When are masks NOT REQUIRED under this new order?

- While eating and drinking
- While playing an instrument that would be obstructed by the face covering
- While participating in high intensity activities such as gym class and outdoor recess
- When working alone and isolated from interaction with other people with little or no expectation of in-person interaction
- While students are participating in sports, whether indoors or outdoors
- When taking a mask break. Students will be provided with numerous opportunities to take a mask break and teachers are caring individuals who know when a mask break is needed.

What are the exemptions to wearing a mask indoors?

- 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
- If an individual is communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing impaired or has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication

What school process/documentation is needed for an exemption to wearing a mask?

FROM PDE: *School entities must require all individuals 2 years of age and older to wear face coverings unless the individual has a medical or mental health condition or disability that precludes the wearing of a face covering. In accordance with Section 3 of the Order, before an individual is exempted from the Order, all alternatives to a face covering, including a face shield, should be exhausted. It is recommended that any exception be in accordance with eligibility under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or IDEA for such medical or mental health condition or disability. School entities should follow their established processes for determining student eligibility under those laws, including any medical documentation that they would normally require.*

The District will approach any request for a mask exemption the same as we did last year. Please contact the Special Services office (570) 888-7766 or by email ecummings@athensasd.org or sreynard@athensasd.org . We will get the process started immediately and our goal is to work with every student and every family that express a medical need for an exemption.

Is there a religious/philosophical exemption to wearing a mask?

No, this type of exemption is not included in the order.

How will the mask order be enforced?

How we approach the wearing of a mask or face covering will be the same approach as we did last year. We plan to work with every student to be compliant with the face covering order. As mentioned earlier, we feel that schools have been put in a difficult position with this new order. We are asking that this issue not ruin the positive relationships we are trying to form with our students and parents. But, without a documented exemption, our district must follow this order. We cannot find a resolution for in-person learning we need to look at having your student being placed in our Wildcat Online Learning Academy (WOLA). We truly hope that we can avoid that because we do want our students to stay in school and in-person learning.

When will this new mask order end?

The Department of Health has shared they will continue to evaluate community transmission rates, vaccination data, and other indicators. The Order states that they will provide an update by October 1, 2021, to make decisions moving forward.

Does wearing a mask prevent one from being a close contact?

Yes, when taking into consideration the face mask requirement in school buildings, students will be less likely to be identified as a close contact and would not be required to quarantine as per CDC. This allows students to consistently maintain in person learning.

How are athletic activities impacted by this new order?

According to the universal face covering order, A student athlete is NOT required to wear a face covering when participating in a sports practice activity or event, indoors or outdoors. Fans attending an indoor event must wear a face covering.

Do visitors need to wear a mask/face covering?

Yes, all visitors will be required to wear a mask at all of our school buildings and the administration building for all indoor events and gatherings.

Will mask breaks be given throughout the day?

Yes, our goal is to make sure our students have **several** times throughout the day when they are able to remove their masks. This would include when they are outdoors, at gym class, during lunch, and at recess. Breaks will be given during class time as well.

Does the Order of universal face coverings need to be enforced?

Beginning Tuesday, September 7, 2021, every teacher, child/student, staff, or visitor working, attending, or visiting our schools are required to wear a face covering while indoors, regardless of vaccination status. The Order, supported by the Governor, comes from the Department of Health through the Disease Prevention and Control Law of 1955.

The PA Dept. of Education has released the following liability statement: *“School officials who fail to adhere to the order could lose the protection of sovereign immunity and may personally face lawsuits from those who may be affected by any official’s attempt to ignore the order. Failing to implement or follow the control measures may expose individuals to personal liability under 42 Pa.C.S § 8550 (relating to willful misconduct), as well as other remedies as provided by law. Failure to implement and follow the control measures under the Order also subjects a person to the penalty provisions of the Disease Prevention and Control Law of 1955.”*