

FACE COVERINGS

The Ware School District is committed to providing a safe environment in schools during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Maintaining a safe environment is critical to the District's ability to return students to a full-time classroom learning experience.

Background

According to public health experts, one of the best ways to stop the spread of coronavirus and to keep members of our school community safe is the use of face masks or face coverings. Therefore, using the guidance and recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), the District has established the following requirements which will remain in place until further notice.

Mask hygiene addresses how often masks should be changed or washed. Disposable masks should be replaced every day or after each use, depending on exposure. Re-usable masks should be washed every day. Guidelines and procedures for each school building are available online to ensure the effectiveness of masks are not reduced.

Protocols

Mask Wearing: A face covering that covers the nose and mouth must be worn by all individuals in school buildings and on school transportation. Face coverings must also be worn outside when social distancing cannot be observed. Appropriate mask hygiene is required on a daily basis.

Individuals may be excused from the requirement for the following list of reasons, per CDC guidance:

The individual:

- has trouble breathing.
- is unconscious.
- is incapacitated.
- cannot remove the mask or face covering without assistance.

Mask Exemptions: In addition, masks or face coverings will not be required for anyone who has a medical, behavioral, or other challenge making it unsafe to wear a face mask or face covering. A written note from a physician is required for a requested exemption. Parents may not excuse their child from the face mask requirement by signing a waiver.

Additionally, face masks or face coverings will not be required when appropriate social distancing is enforced, as deemed necessary subject to approval by principal or administrator:

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- during mask breaks.
- while eating or drinking.
- while outside.

Mask Exceptions: Exceptions to this policy under certain circumstances, such as for students with medical, behavioral, or other challenges who are unable to wear masks, must be approved by the building principal in consultation with the school nurse or local Board of Health. Face shields or physical barriers may provide an alternative in some instances.

Mask Supplies: A student's mask or face covering is to be provided by the student's family. Staff members are responsible for providing their own face coverings. However, the district will supply disposable face covering for individuals who arrive at a building, or board school transportation, without one. The district will also supply a disposable mask if it is determined that a mask does not meet hygiene requirements. Regarding re-usable masks personally owned by students that need to be replaced during school, the district will follow appropriate procedures for the interim storage/packaging of the re-usable masks so that the student can take home the mask for proper hygiene care.

Mask Disposal: Because masks act as a physical barrier against respiratory droplets and germs, they can also transfer those particles onto other surfaces. This makes disposable masks a potential hazard in spreading and transmitting disease if reused or not properly discarded. The district will follow appropriate procedures for proper discarding of masks.

Violations

Students: A student, without violation, may remove a mask due to reasons that include hygiene, discomfort, breathing issues, or anxiety. The student is expected to discuss with the appropriate teacher or administrator. Removal of masks during sports activities also applies but is subject to applicable MIAA regulations.

If students are in violation of this policy, the building principal will consult with the parent/guardians to determine whether an exception is appropriate. Discipline steps will not be taken for suspension or removal without required due process consistent with existing policy and Massachusetts General Laws.

Staff: Violations of this policy by staff will be handled in the same manner as other violations of School Committee policy, subject to applicable employer/employee contracts already in place, and includes appropriate mask wearing as well as appropriate mask enforcement with students.

Visitors: Visitors in violation of this policy will be denied entry to the school/district facility.

This policy will remain in place until revised or rescinded by the School Committee.

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Guidance Statements

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/updated-advisory-regarding-masks-and-face-coverings-july-30-2021-0/download>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention – Guidance for Covid-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools Updated August 5, 2021 -

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

Center for Disease Controls – Guidance for Covid-19 Prevention on Public Transportation

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html>

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – Fall 2021 Covid-19 Guidance

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/2021-0730fall-2021-covid19-guidance.pdf>

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