



Guidance on Mandatory Masks

At its regular Board meeting on Tuesday, July 14, 2020, the Okeechobee County School Board voted to require masks. On Thursday, July 23, 2020, the Board approved this guidance as a part of Okeechobee's Reopening Plan. [This plan was further refined by the Okeechobee County Health Department on Thursday, August 13, 2020.](#) The following questions and answers are meant to clarify and provide guidance on this mandate.

1. [Why is this guidance being updated?](#)

[The CDC released additional guidance recognizing that social distancing is most effective when coupled with other safe practices. That being said, just because you are 6 feet away from one another does not necessarily mean you are not at risk. Health Departments were given some information on what to do when determining if a school, classroom, bus, or group of students and employees need to be isolated or excluded from school. They have agreed to work with us on a case by case basis in making "surgical not sweeping" decisions but can only do so if they feel the appropriate mitigation strategies are in place such as masks. They will collect the following information from us in the event of a positive case:](#)

- [Class roster](#)
- [Bus roster](#)
- [Visitor log to each classroom showing sign-in and sign-out times](#)
- [Classroom set-up/arrangement](#)
- [Mask protocol – Are masks being worn, were they temporarily taken off, and for how long and on what days](#)

~~1.~~2. [Why are masks being required?](#)

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted through speaking, coughing, or sneezing. Respiratory droplets can be spread when a person talks, raises their voice, shouts and even sings. Because social distancing will not be feasible in many situations on the bus, walking down the hallway, sitting near another person in a confined space or standing in a line, masks are an [additional critical primary](#) mitigation strategy to prevent COVID. Here is a link to the CDC website that offers [evidence for effectiveness of face coverings](#).

~~2.~~3. [What constitutes a mask?](#)

More appropriately referred to as face coverings, the following items will meet the requirement:

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| - Surgical masks | - Bandanas |
| - Scarfs | - Fishing buffs |

~~3.~~4. [Are there any type of masks that are prohibited?](#)

- Any mask or covering that does not meet the dress code requirements for appropriateness i.e. tobacco or alcohol insignias or other information that would be in violation if it were on a shirt
- Any mask that has holes in it over the nose or mouth [\(masks with "valves" that are not N95 masks are not allowed\)](#)
- Any covering made of mesh
- Masks that are worn to purposefully cover the entire face to conceal identity (ski mask, gas mask, costume mask, etc.)
- Any face shield by itself does not cover the nose and mouth to prevent COVID

~~4. When are face coverings required?~~

~~Any time when social distancing is not feasible. The CDC defines social distancing as 6 feet.~~

5. If my child is sick, can he/she still come to school if he/she wears a mask?
No, children who are sick must stay home. Here are the [symptoms](#) of COVID. Please consult your child's doctor if his/her symptoms are consistent with the symptoms of COVID.
6. Are masks required outside?
Yes, if social distancing is not possible.
No, if you are 6 feet or more away from another person.
7. Are masks required while riding the bus?
Yes. Social distancing is not possible on the bus. A limited supply of masks will be available on buses for emergencies only.
8. Am I responsible for supplying my child's face coverings?
Yes. School buildings will be stocked with a limited number of disposable masks for emergency situations only.
9. Are employee's responsible for providing their own mask?
No. The Florida Department of Education sent the district 15 cloth masks for each employee to wear on the job. Covers may be machine washed up to 15 times before discarding. Mask fabric has been treated with a silver and copper solution to have some antimicrobial properties. To qualify for an exemption from wearing a mask, employees may present a doctor's note to their supervisor.
10. Is this a permanent rule or will it be reconsidered?
As a part of the decision to require masks, the School Board committed to revisit the requirement to wear masks after the 1st 9 weeks of school.
11. My child has PE, will they be required to wear a mask during physical activity?
Students in physical education class will not be required to wear a mask if they are more than 6 feet apart in the gym or outside. When participating in classroom instruction, even though in PE, a mask must be worn if not 6 feet apart.
12. Are there any exceptions to the requirement to wear masks?
Yes, students that have medical issues or certain disabilities may be exempt from wearing a mask. Masks should NOT be worn by children under the age of 2 or anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. To qualify for an exemption, please have your child's doctor write a note to give to the school and he or she will be exempted from wearing a mask. An IEP Team may also exempt a child from wearing a mask, especially for students that are not capable of removing the mask themselves. This should only be considered after consultation with a parent and or medical professional.
There is also a religious exemption. If your religion prevents you from wearing a mask, the parent or guardian may write a note explaining such exemption and submit it to the school and your child will be exempted from wearing a mask.
[Keep in mind that students or employees that are not wearing a mask due to an exemption will most likely be asked to isolate by the health department after any type of exposure.](#)
13. What if I will not let my child wear a mask?
Masks are required unless you qualify for an exemption as stated above. We have two other Instructional Options, Okeechobee Synch and Okeechobee Virtual. Neither of these educational options require a mask.

14. If I have the ability in my classroom to arrange students so they are [socially distanced](#), and they are not moving around the room, can students **temporarily** remove their masks if I give my permission?

Yes, [the key here is temporarily. Even if your classroom is socially distanced, students should be wearing masks. However, teachers have the ability to offer very short breaks \(5 minutes or less\). Teachers are encouraged to take breaks outside if schedules permit and students can be arranged more than 6 feet apart. There is a false sense of security that one is not at risk if they are 6 feet away from another. Anyone being around a positive case will experience risk even if they are more than 6 feet apart. Keep in mind what you allow temporarily in your classroom will potentially impact the entire school and district departments. Secondly, be mindful that students get up sometimes when they are not supposed to. Everyone has done a great job trying to distance their desks as much as possible given the size of their room. Most who can, have set their desk 6 feet on center. If we were truly socially distanced in all scenarios, it would require 12 feet on center which is impossible. This is why there should be no movement when the masks are off temporarily.](#)

15. Do students have to wear face coverings during class changes if the hallways are outside?

Yes, unless social distancing is possible.

16. Will students receive consequences for not wearing a mask?

The district is using an educational approach to emphasize the merits of the mandate. The younger the students, the more education may be required. Older students should be more responsible and need less education. Disciplinary consequences may be administered at the principal's discretion based on age and or number of infractions. Consequences may be similar to dress code violations in that students may not be able to attend class unless they comply with the mask mandate. Students with repeated infractions may result in a transfer to Instructional Options 2 or 3 which do not require masks.

17. Are masks required in the cafeteria?

Students are required to wear a mask in the cafeteria except while eating or drinking and or when the cafeteria seating arrangement allows for physical distancing.

18. [As a school board employee, my work hours begin and end when students are not on campus, do I need to wear a mask when students are not present?](#)

[Yes. Wearing a mask is not just for student safety, it is also for employee safety. The only time an employee is permitted to not wear a mask is in their office/classroom/bus/district vehicle, alone, with their door locked or at other obvious times such as eating, drinking, outside greater than 6 feet apart, etc.](#)

19. Besides face coverings, what else can I do to prevent COVID?

The CDC recommends the following guidance to [stop-the-spread-of-germs](#).