

## **FACE COVERINGS**

The North Middlesex Regional 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 returning students to a full-time classroom learning experience.

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.

A face covering that covers the nose and mouth must be worn by all individuals in school buildings and on school transportation. Exempted from this policy are students in the Preschool program under the age of 5.

The following types of masks/face coverings are acceptable to wear at school:

- Disposable surgical masks (must be replaced daily; cannot be reused or washed);
- Fabric masks (preferably at least two layers); or
- Face shields along with a surgical or fabric mask.

Thicker, more densely woven cotton fabrics are best, such as quilting cotton or cotton sheets. Stretchy knits are not ideal. Hold the fabric up to the light: The fewer tiny holes you can see, the better it will work to filter droplets. You want fabric that doesn't allow droplets to pass through while ensuring you can still breathe properly with your mask in place.

The following types of masks/face coverings are not acceptable to wear at school:

- Masks with vents;
- Neck gaiters; or
- Plastic face shields alone without a fabric or surgical mask.

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; and/or
- cannot remove the mask or face covering without assistance.

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. The note must include a diagnosis for which it would be reasonable to expect an 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:

- during mask breaks;
- while eating or drinking; and/or

- while outside.

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.

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.

If students are in violation of this policy, the building principal will consult with the parent/guardians to determine whether an exception is appropriate, or the student may be removed from the school building for in-person learning until such time as they can comply with the requirement, or the requirement is lifted.

Violations of this policy by students will be handled primarily as a matter involving protection of the health and safety of the school community. A student who does not have a mask will be provided a mask to use. Any student who refuses to comply with the mask requirement will be removed from school. A continuing violation may result in the District requiring that the student receive alternative educational services.

Violations of this policy by students may also be handled in the same manner as other violations of School Committee policy in appropriate circumstances, including but not limited to discipline consistent with Policy JIC.

Violations of this policy by staff will be handled in the same manner as other violations of School Committee policy.

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

Effective immediately, the District will evaluate the vaccination rates of students and staff in each District building. Effective October 1, 2021, the mask mandate will be lifted for vaccinated students and staff of middle and high school buildings where at least 80% of students and staff have been fully vaccinated. Regardless of the vaccination rate in a building, unvaccinated students and staff will still be required to wear masks.

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

#### 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>

SOURCE: MASC – August 10, 2021

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**Adopted by the NMRSD School Committee:**

Informational Review: September 1, 2020

Immediate Adoption: September 8, 2020, and August 26, 2021

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