

## **School FAQs 2021-2022 - ARCHIVE**

Resources:

[Ready Schools, Safe Learners Resilience Framework 2021-2022](#)

[Planning for Individualized COVID-19 Recovery Services](#)

[OHA Facebook event - Masking Requirements in Schools - Video August 17, 2021](#)

### **What can students and families expect for the 2021-22 school year?**

Students learn best when they are able to attend school in-person. Our priority is to support schools to implement the protocols needed to reliably hold school in-person, every school day, for all students, all year long. School is compulsory in Oregon. Students are required to attend school, which is a congregate setting where SARS-CoV2, the virus causing COVID-19, can spread easily if precautions are not taken.

Because students are required to be there, it is our responsibility to ensure they can do so safely. Because many people are close together indoors in school, there is high potential for spreading SARS-CoV-2. Fortunately, schools in Oregon have taken strong steps to limit the spread of the virus in schools last year when multiple protocols were in place and with more than 120 state requirements.

Building on those steps and learning from our experience so far, the Oregon Department of Education released Ready Schools, Safe Learners: Resiliency Framework for the 2021-22 School Year with recommended protocols for health and safety, along with four requirements that all K-12 public, charter, and private schools must follow.

Limiting the spread of the virus in schools will also have the benefit of reducing the spread throughout the rest of the community, including the families of students and staff

### **Where can I find the guidance for returning to in-person schooling?**

The full guidelines from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Oregon Health Authority (OHA) for returning to school this year are available here: Ready Schools, SafeLearners: Resiliency Framework for the 2021-22 School Year.

The vast majority of health and safety measures in this Resiliency Framework – 116 out of 120 – are advisory. They are offered as recommendations to schools to support successful fulltime, in-person instruction for the 2021-22 school year. These include guidance on how to provide physical distancing, improve ventilation and airflow, increase handwashing, and other safety measures.

There are only four areas that are requirements for every school in the state:

- Face coverings are required to be worn in schools.
- Schools must publish their plan for operations, so their community knows what the school is doing to reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2.
- Schools must follow quarantine and isolation protocols, in partnership with Lane County Public Health.
- For students experiencing disability, schools must provide for individualized COVID-19 recovery services.

The OHA rule that requires the wearing of face coverings in schools is available here: [OAR 333-019-1015: Masking Requirements in Schools](#). As the state public health agency, OHA has authority to adopt rules to prescribe measures and methods for controlling reportable diseases, including COVID-19.

OHA and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have updated guidelines for responding to COVID-19 cases in schools to prioritize in-person learning. What this means, bottom line, is that when schools have layered mitigation measures in place – including universal and correct use of face coverings – fewer kids will spend time out of school under quarantine, or out sick with COVID-19.

### **How are things different now from what they were last year at the start of school?**

We know a lot more about the virus now than this time last year. We know much more about how it spreads and how to keep students and teachers safe.

Oregon has seen a steep increase in COVID-19 rates and hospitalizations in recent weeks. This is driven by the Delta variant of the virus, which is much more easily transmitted and now makes up over 80% of cases in Oregon. There have been more “breakthrough cases” among vaccinated people due to the Delta variant, though the number of breakthrough cases remains low. There is not yet good information on whether the Delta variant causes more severe illness among children, but among adults (including younger adults) there is an increase in hospitalizations. In fact, hospitalizations are up so much that hospital bed capacity across the state is highly stressed.

### **If COVID-19 cases are going up again, is it safe to return to in-person school at all?**

Cases are up, but from our experience last year, it is possible to greatly limit the spread of COVID-19 in schools if proper protective measures are taken. The rules and recommendations for in-person school have been designed to do just that.

These rules, especially the mask requirement, align with the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Oregon Pediatric Society and the Oregon Academy of Family Physicians. These organizations share the view that getting children back into schools alongside their friends and their teachers is critical, and that it can be safe if done properly.

In Oregon and elsewhere, we have seen that in congregate settings, with protocols followed, including face coverings, we can reduce and nearly eliminate the spread – but only if protocols are followed. We also have seen high rates of spread in places where face coverings were not required.

Face coverings, keeping physical distance, and regular hand washing are tools we have been using to control the spread of the virus. Each of those measures, in and of themselves, is insufficient to control the spread of the virus, but when multiple measures are in place, they are more effective at controlling the spread of the virus.

### **Are private schools required to follow the same rules as public schools?**

Yes, we care equally about the health and education of students in private schools as in public schools. The few statewide requirements are the same for private and public schools, and their approach to the recommended protocols are up to them, as with public schools.

**My unvaccinated child has some cold symptoms, but has not had a known exposure to Covid-19 and has not traveled out of state. Do I need a negative PCR test to return to childcare?**

To protect the health and safety of our community, particularly children who are too young to be vaccinated, it is recommended that any child with cold or flu-like symptoms receive a negative PCR test before returning to childcare, regardless of vaccination status. If the PCR result is negative the child should still stay home until 24-hours without fever and symptom improvement, without the use of a fever reducing agent. In all cases, we recommend your child get evaluated by their medical provider.

## **Mask Requirements**

### **Who is required to wear a mask? When and where?**

The [mask rule](#) requires everyone, including students, staff, contractors, volunteers, and visitors, to wear a mask when in an indoor setting:

- At school during regular school hours
- Engaged in educational activities such as field trips or off-campus classes during regular school hours, or
- At school engaged in educational activities outside of regular school hours.

### **Are there times when someone in a school would not be required to wear a mask?**

There are exceptions in the rule. People do not need to wear a mask when:

- Actively eating or drinking
- Sleeping
- Playing a musical instrument that requires using the mouth
- Engaged in a sport during physical education class such as swimming, other water sports, or a sport where wearing a mask could be a strangulation hazard such as gymnastics or wrestling
- Is in a private individual workspace
- Is under five years of age; unless an individual is using public transportation including school buses in which case an individual under two years of age is not required to wear a mask, or
- Is practicing or playing a competitive extracurricular sport at any level.

Also, note that [OAR 333-019-1025](#) also requires masks be worn while in indoor public settings (like retail stores, offices, etc.).

### **Are masks required outdoors while at school?**

No, studies have shown that the virus is much less likely to be transmitted outdoors. That is why, under OHA rules and guidance, it is acceptable for both vaccinated and unvaccinated people to be outdoors without a face covering. Check with your local county officials to learn more about masks outdoors in public settings.

**Are masks required when singing? Are masks required during educational activities away from school or after school?**

Yes, masks are required while singing indoors. The only times an individual is not required to wear a mask is when the exceptions listed above apply.

Yes, the requirements are the same for educational activities such as field trips or offcampus classes, or after school hours, as for in classrooms during school hours.

**Are masks required on school buses?**

Yes, everyone age two or older must wear a mask while riding a school bus. The CDC [issued an Order](#) on January 29, 2021 requiring the wearing of masks by people on public transportation conveyances or on the premises of transportation hubs to prevent spread of the virus. The CDC order for mandatory use of face coverings on public transit applies to school buses until lifted by the federal government and cannot be waived by state or local authorities. [The text of the federal order](#) and the [CDC guidance](#) is available on the CDC website. In addition, the CDC has provided clarity through these [FAQs](#).

Distancing and other measures to limit spread on school buses are managed by school districts. This will follow the same principles as in schools but may vary by local conditions.

**What types of face coverings are allowed? Will schools provide masks for students?**

The biggest health difference is between no mask at all and any mask. Even cloth or disposable masks are very effective at reducing transmission of the virus. N95 masks do offer a higher level of protection, but they are not necessary to greatly reduce the spread.

Plastic face shields are generally not allowed, because they are not sealed at the top or bottom, so they are not as effective at containing the respiratory droplets that can carry the virus. However, a face shield may be worn instead of a mask if an individual cannot wear a mask for medical reasons.

Yes, schools will have masks available for students who forget their masks or lose them or if they get dirty. We have been using some of the federal funds received earlier for schools to supply masks. Last year, ODE distributed over six million masks. This year schools have access to American Rescue Plan Act funds from the federal government that can be used for this purpose. ODE has compiled [resources relating to face covering requirements](#) in schools.

**Why can't students take their mask off at their desk, like in a restaurant?**

Schools and restaurants have distinct purposes. A key difference is that schools are primarily unvaccinated settings. At this time, students age 12 and under are not eligible for the vaccine, making the majority of elementary and middle schools unvaccinated settings. In turn, we have a higher obligation to keep students safe by layering mitigation strategies that we know reduce the spread of the virus.

Another difference is that students are required to be in school and spend considerably more time in schools than they do restaurants.

Furthermore, schools will have three-foot distancing to the extent possible, recognizing the logistical constraints of many school facilities. Restaurants are required to allow for six feet of distancing between parties.

**Will teachers and staff be able to take their masks off when they are alone?**

Employees are not required to wear a mask in a private individual workspace. A private individual workspace is defined as an indoor space within a school used for work by one individual at a time that is enclosed on all sides with walls from floor to ceiling and with a closed door

**Does wearing a mask reduce the transmission of COVID-19? What is the scientific evidence for this?**

**Does wearing a mask all day harm the health of children?**

This past year has been very hard on everyone: students, educators, and families alike. But no, there is no credible evidence that the wearing of masks harms the physical or mental health of children.

The CDC review linked above includes studies of the effect of masks on breathing. It found mask use to be safe and not associated with clinically significant impacts on respiration or gas exchange, including for very young children.

There is evidence that being in a class in front of teachers has mental health benefits. [Research indicates](#) that in-person school is crucial in supporting the social-emotional health of students and their families. Face coverings, by reducing the risk of exposure and transmission of the virus, increase the likelihood that students will be able to stay in school.

**How will the mask requirement be enforced? What happens if a child does not wear a mask or otherwise follow the rules? What happens if a teacher does not wear a mask or otherwise follow the rules?**

Schools are encouraged to lead with care. We know there will be times when students forget to put their face covering back on or wear a face covering incorrectly. When students falter in consistently and correctly wearing a face covering, we ask school staff to center grace and patience and reteach the expectation. We seek to refrain from implementing punitive consequences that deny access to instruction as a result of these challenges. Schools and teams should continually provide instruction and positive reinforcement to help all students adapt to the changes in school facilities while avoiding punitive measures. The goal should be to remind, motivate and reinforce healthy practices.

In the case that a student or family chooses not to wear a face covering for reasons other than medical need or disability, schools should follow district processes to determine how to respond, keeping in mind both the responsibility for health and safety of everyone in the school setting and the student's need to access education. (For students with a medical need or disability, see the next section.) Conversations should be progressive and lead to resolution that ideally does not involve suspension.

However, schools cannot serve a student in-person if they or their family choose not to wear a face covering. Schools may offer a remote or online school option for the student. The goal is to keep

students in schools. We will protect the ability of other students to stay in school, so action will be taken with the person who does not wear a mask, rather than require everyone else to adjust to that one person.

As with students, the first goal with teachers and staff will be to provide information about why the mask requirement is important.

### **What happens if a school or school district does not implement or enforce the rules?**

The first goal is to help school and district leaders understand the rules so they may implement them effectively in their local settings.

If necessary, there is a complaint driven process led by the [Oregon Occupational Safety and Health \(OROSHA\)](#), in accordance with the Oregon Safe Employment Act. Any person who has a concern that state rules are not being followed or that a school is not in compliance with the RSSL guidance can file a named or confidential complaint with Oregon OSHA at 1-833-604-0884 [or online](#). If OHA or ODE receive complaints, they will refer them to OROSHA. If voluntary measures do not resolve the issue, OROSHA can impose fines for serious violations, from \$100 to over \$100,000 for willful negligence, plus daily penalties for continued noncompliance.

In addition, OHA has authority to enforce the requirements, and may rely on OROSHA's investigation and findings to take enforcement action as warranted to secure compliance.

### **What if a child has a medical condition or disability that means they cannot wear a mask?**

If a student has a medical condition or disability that impedes their ability to wear a face covering, the school district will work with the family to provide in-person education. The details will vary based on the exact need. It may involve more physical distancing, more protective equipment for the staff who work with that student, or other types of accommodations, but the aim is to keep that student in school and learning. ODE has issued guidance on [reasonable accommodation of face covering requirements](#).

The Resiliency Framework for the 2021-22 school year states that schools and districts will be returning to existing requirements related to children with disabilities. The following information is intended to serve as a reminder and highlight some of those existing standards that districts need to be aware of as the state transitions away from previous guidance.

- School districts must identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities for whom they are responsible, regardless of the severity of the disability, who are in need of early intervention, early childhood special education, or special education services (OAR 581-015-2080).
- School districts must not discriminate based on age, disability, national origin, race, color, marital status, religion, sex or sexual orientation (OAR 581-021-0045 Discrimination Prohibited).
- School districts must meet the educational needs (academic, behavioral, and functional) of all students (OAR 581-022-0103) and ensure access to a free appropriate public education for

students who experience disability (OAR 581- 015-2040, 34 CFR 104.33). See also: [Considering Reasonable Accommodation of Face Covering Requirements 2021-22 School Year](#).

- Public entities must make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless the public entity can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity (28 CFR § 35.130)

**What if a child is deaf or hard of hearing and needs to read lips? Or has speech and articulation issues, so they need to see teachers' mouths as they model sounds, letters, and pronunciations?**

There are clear masks available for when people need to read lips or see a teacher's mouth.

**What if a child has speech problems and are harder to understand with a mask on?**

Certain [accommodations](#) for medical needs or disability may be necessary.

## **Remote and Distance Learning**

**Will there be an option for remote or distance learning?**

The priority for the 2021-22 school year is to hold in-person instruction for all students, every school day. We know this is what's best for students to be able to access social-emotional learning supports, nutrition services, and connection with teachers and peers.

All school districts have the option to create a remote learning option for students. There is no statewide requirement to provide remote learning.

Schools also have a responsibility to plan for COVID-19 scenarios in schools, should an outbreak or exposure warrant quarantine. During periods where students are quarantined, school districts are required to offer a remote learning option until the student can safely return to school.

**What if there is an outbreak? At what point would schools return to remote or distance learning?**

ODE has developed a resource for school and district leaders: [Planning for COVID-19 Scenarios in Schools](#) to help support their efforts in managing COVID-19 scenarios at school. The resource contains template tools for communicating with students, staff and families. One of the primary partners school districts will rely on in the case of an outbreak is their local public health authority (typically the county health department). Depending on the course of the pandemic and on outbreaks in particular schools, it could be that some schools could need to shift to remote instruction. This will be a case-by case decision that will need to be made based on the specific circumstances of that school and community

**Why did ODE tell school districts to prepare for remote learning?**

We have asked schools to be prepared for online instruction if necessary. If, indeed, a school must turn to online learning, it will be important to have a clear plan and preparations in place, to minimize disruption to students' education. However, there is currently no statewide decision to move to remote learning if it can be avoided.

**Where can I find more information on Distance Learning?**

[Comprehensive Distance Learning \(CDL\) Guidance](#)

[Ensuring Equity and Access Guidance](#)

[New Guidance for Limited In-Person Instruction During CDL](#)

## **Decision Making**

### **Why not leave the decisions about masks and in-person schooling up to local communities? Or to parents?**

Oregon is still under a statewide public health emergency related to COVID-19. Under state law, OHA has a responsibility and authority to protect public health.

SARS-CoV-2 spreads widely. The Delta variant is about three times more contagious. The virus does not care about county lines or school district boundaries. Ultimately, no community or family in Oregon is fully protected until this virus is controlled throughout the entire state.

Furthermore, hospital beds in Oregon are a statewide resource. Even before this pandemic, it was common for patients to be transferred from region to region if needed to find a hospital bed. This has become even more critical with the recent increase in hospitalizations from COVID-19. Thus, any avoidable hospitalization anywhere in the state directly affects patients or future patients in every community in Oregon.

### **How will OHA decide whether to change the mask requirement or other requirements? What are the criteria and data for deciding this?**

OHA and ODE will continue to monitor the spread of the virus, rates of COVID-19, hospitalization rates and impacts on the state hospital system, vaccination rates, the impacts of the Delta variant, and outbreaks in school settings, among other things.

In particular, OHA will review the mask rule monthly to determine whether or not there is a need for it to continue. Broadly, OHA will look at four things:

- Intensity: How much disease is there across the state and in communities? How many cases, among both adults and children?
- Trajectory: Are cases and hospitalizations going up or down? Right now, they are going up.
- Capacity: What is the hospital capacity? Right now, we are setting records for the number of people hospitalized for COVID-19, so that every hospital in the state is approaching or beyond capacity. It is critical that schools not become a source of additional infections that would add to hospitalizations.
- Emerging issues: These could be good or bad. For example, a new variant might cause more serious illness, or vaccines may be approved for children under 12.

The data OHA uses for these decisions are publicly available and posted here: [Daily Update](#) and [Data Dashboards](#). They include cases, hospitalizations, vaccination rates, information on variants, demographic information, and more.

Will the mask requirement and other rules be in place for the entire school year? Will schools remain open for in-person classes for the entire school year?

The goal is to keep schools open all year. The further goal is to clear the way to no longer needing masks and other protective measures at all, as soon as possible.

However, we don't set the timeline. The virus sets the timeline. Unfortunately, we cannot give exact parameters for when mask mandates will end, or if or when we might need to return to distance learning. We will adapt to any surprises to keep our schools safe, ready, and operating in-person.

**Aren't children at low risk from COVID-19? How many children in Oregon have contracted COVID-19? How many have died from it?**

[OHA's pediatric data dashboard](#) notes that through August 18, 2021, there were 41,919 Oregon children age 19 or younger who were reported as having COVID-19. At least 384 were hospitalized (though more may have been hospitalized without it being reported to OHA). This includes 12,686 reported cases and at least 149 hospitalizations among children under age 10.

At the time of this publication, four Oregon children age 19 or younger, including one under age 10, have died from COVID-19. That is four too many. There is no acceptable number of child deaths, and no justification for not taking action that we know may prevent them.

The school re-opening measures are designed to allow for in-person classes – which we know are critically important for students' education and well-being – while limiting risk as much as possible. Even if serious illness or death from COVID-19 are rare among children, the aim is to minimize the chances that any child – and the people who love them – will need to confront even those long odds.

**Can children transmit the virus to others?**

Yes. Children can transmit the virus to others, even if they do not show symptoms. Thus, it is possible for them to bring it home to family or friends, who may be more susceptible than the child to serious illness or death.

## **Quarantine, Testing, and Responding to Cases**

**Are schools a place where the virus is commonly spread? Have there been outbreaks in schools?**

The spread of SARS-CoV-2 was not common in Oregon schools last year. That is a testament to how well schools maintained protections (including masks). However, even with those efforts, there have been some outbreaks in schools in Oregon.

Because children under age 5 are not yet eligible for a vaccine, and a significant number of people age 5 and older are not yet vaccinated, schools are largely unvaccinated settings. Thus, they have high

potential to be a place for transmission if safety precautions are not taken. In other states that have started in-person school without masks and other protective measures in place, there are already many reports of outbreaks and schools needing to close again.

When transmission in a community is high, there is an increased likelihood that the virus will be introduced to, and potentially transmitted within, a school setting. The CDC's brief on [Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs](#) summarizes evidence of transmission of the COVID-19 among children and adolescents as well as what is known about preventing transmission in school settings and Early Care and Education (ECE) programs. Several studies have shown that when prevention strategies like masking are in place, transmission within school settings is lower than or similar to levels of community transmission, but when prevention strategies are not in place, secondary transmission within school settings and ECE programs occurs.

### **Will parents be notified if there are cases or outbreaks in their child's school?**

OHA and ODE strongly advise that Response to Outbreak protocols include the following:

- Reviewing and using the "[Planning for COVID-19 Scenarios in Schools](#)" toolkit.
- Coordinating with the local public health authority to establish communication channels related to current transmission level.
- Means by which school will ensure continuous education services for students and supports for staff.
- Means by which school will continue to provide meals for students. •
- Cleaning surfaces (e.g. door handles, sink handles, drinking fountains, transport vehicles) following CDC guidance.

### **What happens if a child or adult in a school tests positive for COVID-19?**

If anyone tests positive for COVID-19, they will need to isolate, generally at home, and not be at school under any circumstances. Under CDC guidelines, patients should isolate for at least 10 days or until their symptoms have cleared up, whichever is longer. At that point, they do not need a test in order to end isolation and return to school.

### **What happens if a child is exposed to someone who has the virus, but has not themselves tested positive or shown symptoms?**

When students are at least three feet apart and everyone is wearing a face covering, [students who are in close contact with someone with COVID-19 do not need to quarantine unless they have symptoms](#). Without face coverings and at least three feet of distance, students in close contact with someone with COVID-19 will need to quarantine and miss school days. This could include all members of their cohort.

If no face coverings are worn and students do not distance, it becomes more difficult to track down close contacts. Exposure to a confirmed case can compound when students shift to new classrooms or visit other indoor spaces in the school, such as the library or gym. This could lead to quarantining of full grades or full school closure.

Note that exposure is different from testing positive. Exposure or "close contact" means being less than six feet away, for longer than 15 cumulative minutes in a day, from a person who has COVID-19.

This modified rule about quarantine for students is because transmission is less likely (but not impossible) among children, and because of the importance of in-person schooling.

**What happens if a teacher or staff is exposed to someone who has the virus?**

The modified quarantine rule described above for children does not apply to adults in the school setting. They would need to quarantine after exposure. Note that fully vaccinated people do not need to quarantine unless they develop symptoms. You are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after a second-vaccine dose from Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna, or two weeks after your single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Schools should follow a determination by local public health authorities on who needs to quarantine in the case of an exposure.

**If a child needs to quarantine or isolate, how will they continue their education? Will there be a way for them to access school work?**

Schools are required to provide a remote learning option for students who need to quarantine or isolate.

**Will COVID-19 tests be available?**

When students or staff develop symptoms at school or are exposed to COVID-19 at school, schools have the option to offer onsite testing in partnership with OHA. Almost all public schools participate in this service.

**Are COVID-19 tests required?**

Testing is not mandatory but is highly recommended. Unvaccinated students or staff should be tested shortly after exposure is recognized. Fully vaccinated students or staff should be tested three to five days after exposure regardless of symptoms developing or not. People who tested positive, after they isolate for at least 10 days or until their symptoms have cleared up, whichever is longer, do not need another test to end isolation and return to school.