



July 6, 2020

Pennsylvania Issues Order Requiring Universal Face Coverings to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19

Dr. Rachel Levine, PA Secretary of Health, has issued a **statewide order requiring universal face coverings** to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the Commonwealth. **The order applies immediately to all individuals in school entities** including but not limited to public K-12 schools, brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, private and parochial schools, career and technical centers, intermediate units, detention centers, PA Pre-K Counts programs, Head Start programs and preschool early intervention programs.

The order includes three important types of information, summarized below: 1) a definition of face covering; 2) a list of circumstances in which face coverings are required; and 3) exceptions to the face covering requirement.

Definition of Face Covering

The PA Department of Health defines a face covering as a covering of the mouth and nose secured to the head with ties, straps or loops that go around the ears or wrap around the lower face. Face coverings can be made of fabrics including cotton, silk, or linen. Plastic face shields covering the nose and mouth also are considered a face covering. Face coverings may be manufactured, sewn by hand, or improvised from items such as bandanas, towels, t-shirts, or sweatshirts. Individuals who do not work in an occupational or healthcare setting that requires specialized masks should avoid using N95 respirators or other surgical or procedural masks that are intended for specialized professional use in high-risk settings.

Conditions Requiring the Use of a Face Covering

Individuals in PA are required to wear a face covering outside of their home under the following conditions:

1. When an individual is outdoors and unable to consistently maintain 6 feet of distance from individuals who are not members of their household;
2. When an individual is in any indoor location where the public are generally permitted (such as schools);
3. When an individual is waiting for, riding in, driving, or operating public transportation or paratransit. This includes individuals in a taxi, private care service, or ride-sharing vehicle (and includes school buses);
4. When an individual is receiving healthcare services, including visits to a hospital, blood bank, physician's office, pharmacy, dentist's office, veterinarian, or other health facility.
5. When an individual is engaged in work that involves interacting in-person with a member of the public, working in a space that is visited by members of the public, working in a space where food is prepared or packaged, working in or walking through common areas, or working in any other enclosed area where people may be present and unable to socially distance.

Exceptions to the Face Covering Requirement

Individuals who meet one or more of the following criteria are not required to adhere to the universal face covering requirement.

1. People who cannot wear a face covering due to a medical condition, including respiratory conditions that impede breathing and mental health or disability conditions that impede the ability to wear a face covering.

covering. PSEA members with questions about their specific medical conditions and risk from the COVID-19 virus should consult with a medical professional.

Assistive Devices for Sound Projection. Some educators may be concerned that the combination of socially-distanced students and the use of face coverings will make it difficult to project a “teacher voice” to communicate effectively with all students. Educators with concerns about voice projection from behind a face covering may consider requesting amplification equipment from their employer. PSEA members who have concerns about access to necessary amplification equipment should contact their local union leaders and/or UniServ Representative.

Lessons about Wearing Face Coverings. Before students return to school, educators should be provided time to gather resources and develop lessons and strategies to increase students’ comfort with adults who cover their faces and to support the wearing of face coverings by all students.

For Additional Information

PSEA members who have questions or concerns about face covering policies and practices at their place of work should contact their local union leaders or PSEA UniServ Representative. PSEA members with general questions about face covering requirements in the Commonwealth or who are seeking ideas to incorporate mask-wearing lessons into instruction may contact PSEA’s Education Services Division: professionallearning@psea.org.