



The Road Back

Restart and Recovery Plan for Education New Jersey Department of Education



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Update to Conditions of Learning, Health and Safety, “Critical Area of Operation #5: Screening, PPE, and Response to Students and Staff Presenting Symptoms” and “Critical Area of Operation #3: Transportation”

Background/Current Text

Throughout the Conditions for Learning section of “The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education” the NJDOE provides an “Anticipated Minimum Standard” for students, employees, and visitors regarding the use of face coverings. This includes standards for the wearing of face coverings on district-provided transportation and within school buildings.

Specifically, on page 26, under “Critical Area of Operation #5: Screening, PPE, and Response to Students and Staff Presenting Symptoms,” the NJDOE states that:

- Students are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings and are required to do so when social distancing cannot be maintained, unless doing so would inhibit the student’s health. It is necessary to acknowledge that enforcing the use of face coverings may be impractical for young children or individuals with disabilities.”

Additionally, on page 21, under “Critical Area of Operation #3: Transportation,” the NJDOE states that:

- If a district is providing transportation services on a school bus but is unable to maintain social distancing, a face covering must be worn by all students who are able to do so upon entering the bus.
 - Accommodations for students who are unable to wear a face covering should be addressed according to that student’s particular need and in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations

Update

In an editorial published on July 14, 2020 in the Journal of the American Medical Association, the CDC reviewed the latest science and affirmed that face coverings are a critical tool in the fight against COVID-19 that could reduce the spread of the disease, particularly when used universally within communities. This most recent research adds to a growing body of evidence that face coverings help prevent the person wearing the mask from spreading COVID-19 to others. ([“CDC Calls on Americans to Wear Masks to Prevent COVID-19 Spread”](#))



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The CDC also continues to recognize that younger children may be unable to wear a face covering properly, particularly for an extended period of time. (["Considerations for Wearing Masks"](#))

Therefore, the NJDOE is revising its anticipated minimum standard regarding the use of face coverings to **require that all students wear face coverings**, except where doing so would inhibit the individual's health or in the exceptions listed below. The amended language will state:

Critical Area of Operation #5: Screening, PPE, and Response to Students and Staff Presenting Symptoms

Anticipated Minimum Standards

- Students are **required** to wear face coverings, unless doing so would inhibit the student's health. It is necessary to acknowledge that enforcing the use of face coverings may be impractical for young children or individuals with disabilities.
- Exceptions:
 - Doing so would inhibit the student's health.
 - The student is in extreme heat outdoors.
 - The student is in water.
 - A student's documented medical condition, or disability as reflected in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), precludes the use of face covering.
 - The student is under the age of two (2), due to the risk of suffocation.
 - During the period that a student is eating or drinking.
 - Face coverings should not be placed on anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, or anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance (e.g. face coverings should not be worn by Pre-K students during nap time).
 - The student is engaged in high intensity aerobic or anaerobic activities.
 - Face coverings may be removed during gym and music classes when individuals are in a well-ventilated location **and** able to maintain a physical distance of six feet apart.
 - When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task.

To support implementation of these requirements, the NJDOE is providing the following considerations:

Additional Considerations

- Individuals should be frequently reminded not to touch the face covering and to [wash their hands](#) frequently.



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- Information should be provided to staff, students, and students' families on [proper use, removal, and washing of face coverings](#).
- Currently, the CDC does not recommend use of face shields as a substitute for face coverings. Therefore, they may not be used to satisfy the face covering requirement detailed above. However, they may be an option for students with medical or other challenges that preclude the use of face coverings. If face shields are used without a mask, they should wrap around the sides of the wearer's face and extend to below the chin.
- Students and educators that rely on facial cues may consider use of clear face coverings where available. This might include students who are deaf or hard of hearing, students receiving speech/language services, young students in early education programs, and English-language learners.
- Researchers have identified "frequent discomfort" as a potential challenge associated with implementing use of face covering requirements. Students and staff should be provided face covering breaks throughout the day. Face covering breaks should only occur when social distancing can be maintained and ideally outside or with windows open. ("[Physical Distancing, face masks, and eye protection to prevent person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19: a systematic review and meta-analysis](#)")
- Face coverings should be provided by the student's family/guardian and can be included as part of the back to school supplies list provided to families/guardians prior to the start of the school year. Schools should strive to provide extra disposable face coverings for students who need them, and should provide face coverings for students that are experiencing financial hardship and are unable to afford them to the greatest extent possible.
- The CDC recently issued updated guidance regarding [considerations for wearing face coverings](#) and how it can help slow the spread of COVID-19. Schools should refer to this guidance as it includes details regarding who should and should not wear a face covering.

Critical Area of Operation #3: Transportation

Anticipated Minimum Standards

If a district is providing transportation services on a school bus, a face covering must be worn by all students upon entering the bus unless doing so would inhibit the student's health. It is necessary to acknowledge that enforcing the use of face coverings may be impractical for young children or individuals with disabilities.

- For exceptions to face covering requirements, see Critical Area of Operation #5
- Accommodations for students who are unable to wear a face covering should be addressed according to that student's particular need and in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations