

Back to School January 2022



COVID 19 is still with us and we must continue to do what we can to stay safe and healthy. Everyone is working hard to ensure Public Health guidelines are followed in our schools.

One of the most important things we can do is wear the right kind of mask with a proper fit.

What Kind of Mask:

There are updated guidelines regarding the kinds of masks staff and students should wear in school.

- 3 ply cloth masks for students and staff and medical masks for staff will be distributed to schools.
- The mask should completely and comfortably cover the nose, mouth, and chin without gaps at the edges. A flexible nosepiece may provide a better fit over the nose
- The mask should fit securely to the head with ties, bands or ear loops and be comfortable enough so that it does not require frequent adjustments
- Staff must ensure students follow proper mask hygiene for putting on masks, removing, storing and disposing of them

Wearing a mask at school is important for everyone: principal, vice principal, teachers, students, caretakers, and anyone who comes into the school.

While some students are comfortable wearing a masks other may require some additional support to get used to wearing one.

There are [exemptions](#) for some students who have health care needs, or mental health, developmental or cognitive issues.

Strategies and Tips to Help Students Wear a Mask

1. Talk to students about why everyone needs to wear a mask - protection for you and me. Some children may be more willing to wear a mask if they understand why. Remind children that right now doing the things they like at school, such as being with their friends requires them to wear a mask.
2. Empathize with students about the challenges of wearing a mask. Acknowledge it is hard sometimes to wear a mask and it is normal to feel uncomfortable at first, but we can work on getting used to it. If a student finds their mask uncomfortable find out why that is, it may require a small adjustment. If there are additional medical, mental health issues or sensory concerns that make mask wearing difficult you may need to have a Student Planning Team meeting to develop a plan to support the student.
3. Model wearing a mask. It is important that students see everyone wearing a mask and understand why it is important. Demonstrate how you put on the mask, take it off and most importantly ensure there is a snug fit. Periodic mask checks and breaks – “How are we doing?” may be helpful.
4. Make sure you communicate with your students about when they can take their mask off or have a mask break. Knowing a break is coming may make mask wearing easier.
5. Wearing a mask is a learned skill. Practise with your students and check that they are fitting masks properly. Children who are reluctant to wear a mask may require individual practise sessions to help them adjust to wearing one.
6. Positive reinforcement is key! Students should be acknowledged and praised for wearing a mask during the day. General comments such as “I really like seeing everyone wearing their mask properly” to more specific comments such as “This table looks great with their masks on” or “Tommy, you are doing a great job today wearing your mask” lets everyone know they are on track and you notice!

For individual students who require more focused support learning to wear a mask, consistent positive feedback plus tangible reinforcement may be needed. Token boards or incentive charts are a visual representation of how well the student is doing and may provide additional encouragement.

7. Use visual supports, social stories or You Tube videos to explain mask wearing. It may be helpful for some students to have clear written rules about when, where and how they need to wear a mask. These rules can be referred to at the beginning of the day. See list at the end of this document.
8. Show pictures of other people - family members, friends, the student’s favourite characters, i.e., Disney Princesses, wearing masks. Stories or posters with the student’s favourite characters wearing a mask may be an added incentive.

9. Find ways to make mask wearing fun or interesting i.e., art projects such templates for students to draw their faces wearing a mask of their creation and putting their work up in class, language arts projects creating posters about safety measures during COVID, exploring the science of viruses, social studies/history projects about public health measures during other epidemics i.e., the Flu Epidemic of 1918, or mask wearing practises in other countries and cultures.
10. If the student has a learning disability, anxiety issues, developmental delay or is on the autism spectrum, asking them to wear a mask, and keep it on, may be more challenging. Students may require explicit teaching to build up tolerance for wearing a mask, more practice wearing a mask and more frequent breaks. If you have a student who finds it difficult to wear a mask it is important to work with the family and student on a plan.

Interacting with students who are not wearing masks.

Safety of staff and students continues to be of primary importance. Vaccinations are the first line of defense against COVID -19. The province has rolled out its vaccination programs for children ages 5 to 17. Masks are a means of protection for all staff and those they may come into contact with. Frequent handwashing and maintaining a physical distance of 2 metres/6 feet are additional protective measures against COVID-19.

Additional Resources:

Be a Mask Hero (young student)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KRuP1QGmhU>

Why do I have to wear a mask?

[For Kids: Why Do I Have To Wear a Face Mask? - YouTube](#)

The Proper way to wear mask

[How to Wear a Face Mask Properly - YouTube](#)

Social Stories:

Wearing a Mask

<https://famielstogtherinc.org/forms/covid-19/WearingAMaskStoryforChildren.pdf>

Wearing a Mask at School

[wearing a mask to school.pdf - Google Drive](#)

You Tube Story Time

[Heroes Wear Masks Elmo's Super Adventure - Read Aloud Books for Toddlers, Kids and Children - YouTube](#)