

LPS FACE MASK PROTOCOL AND GUIDELINES

In compliance with Governor Charles Baker's order dated May 1, 2020, which went into effect on May 6, 2020, and the guidelines written by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), until further notice, all students, employees, volunteers, and visitors entering Lowell Public Schools (LPS) buildings and/or utilizing transportation or school buses, and/or attending or participating in LPS sponsored events and activities are required to wear a face mask at all times. You cannot enter or move within a building without wearing a mask. Masks may be removed for eating or drinking and specifically timed mask breaks in designated spaces within each building.

We know that the use of a face mask can potentially slow the spread of the virus and can protect against the transmission of the virus from people who may have the virus and be asymptomatic. Because of this, we must follow the recommendations of the [CDC guidelines](#) regarding face masks as of 8/27/20:

- Have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric
- Completely cover your nose and mouth
- Fit snugly against the sides of your face and don't have gaps

You may not use face masks that:

- Are made of fabric that makes it hard to breathe, for example, vinyl
- Have exhalation valves or vents, which allow virus particles to escape
- Are intended for healthcare workers, including N95 respirators

Additionally, you may not use the following face coverings as their effectiveness is currently being evaluated and is unknown at this time:

- gaiters
- face shields

Exceptions to mask requirements:

- Anyone who has a medical condition, a disability, or other health or safety factors which impact an individual's ability to wear a mask or the requirement to wear a certain type of mask (ie. N95 mask); a doctor's note will need to be supplied in this situation.
- Please seek further guidance on these exceptions through your school nurse, principal or designee and also work with your doctor.

- Employees who have a private office or workspace do not need to wear a mask when alone but must put it on immediately upon someone else entering the office or when leaving the office.
- Meal times, mask breaks, and recess, are times when masks may not be required as long as the 6 ft. distancing rules are applied. The mask breaks will be determined and communicated at each school building by the Principal or designee.
- Children younger than 2 years old.

General considerations for the use of face masks, please make sure:

- ✓ The mouth and nose are fully covered.
- ✓ The covering fits snugly against the sides of the face so there are no gaps.
- ✓ The cloth face covering does not constrict or create difficulty breathing while wearing.
- ✓ The cloth face covering is tied or otherwise secured to prevent slipping.
- ✓ Avoid touching your face as much as possible.
- ✓ Keep the covering clean. Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer immediately, before putting on, after touching or adjusting, and after removing the cloth face covering.
- ✓ In general, face coverings should be washed regularly (e.g., daily and whenever soiled).

Follow laundry instructions as directed.

- ✓ Do mark the cloth face covering with your initials or name in permanent ink.
- ✓ Do dispose of one-time use masks in the trash can.
- ✓ Don't touch the outside of your mask while it is on your face.
- ✓ Don't share it with anyone else.
- ✓ Don't pull your mask below your nose while you are wearing it. Leaving the mask dangling or improperly fitted to your face creates opportunities for cross-contamination.

It is recommended that everyone wear a plain face mask and/or LPS or college/university logo masks. However, ultimately all masks must follow the school dress code:

“In the spirit of maintaining an orderly and safe learning environment, students are prohibited from wearing any article of clothing or carrying any backpacks or other accessories which are lewd, which promote violence or hate for any individuals or groups, or which degrade the beliefs of others”.

Any other dress that distracts, disrupts, intimidates, or provokes can be deemed inappropriate by the Principal or designee.

Suggested protocol for students who are not wearing a mask:

1. All students entering the building must wear a mask.
2. Students seeking to enter the building without a face mask will be directed to a PPE station outside the building or to the Principal or designee at school entry ways. No one can enter the building without their mask on.
3. The response to students who take off face masks should be supportive and not start off in a confrontational manner. It is recommended that the conversation include:
 - a. seek to understand the WHY for the behavior,
 - b. reminders of expectation,
 - c. allow for space and processing time separate from other students
 - d. avoid power struggles.
4. We encourage teachers to seek assistance from their administrator if prolonged refusal or elevated risk to others exists.
5. As with any other student concern, please reach out to parents, social workers, guidance, administrators, etc. to ensure the student follows the expectation of mask-wearing.
6. Given that mask-wearing is not a choice, and that it is a requirement of everyone in the building, if a student continues to refuse to comply, a conversation regarding transferring the student to remote learning will take place between the administration and the family.

Suggested protocol for staff who are not wearing a mask:

1. All staff entering the building must wear a mask.
2. Staff seeking to enter the building without a face mask will be directed to a PPE station outside the building or to the Principal or designee at school entry ways. No one can enter the building without their mask on.
3. The response to a staff member who is seen not wearing a face mask should be supportive and not start off in a confrontational manner. The following steps are recommended:
 - a. seek to understand why the individual is not wearing their mask;
 - b. if comfortable, speak with the individual directly and remind them about the policy;
 - c. inform your supervisor/building principal of your concerns; and
 - d. inform Daroth Yann, Assistant Human Resource Director, if necessary.

4. Mask-wearing is not a choice, it is a requirement of anyone in the building. If an adult refuses to comply, then the Principal will address the situation.

Suggested protocol for approved in-person visitors/parents who are not wearing a mask:

1. All visitors/parents entering the building must wear a mask.
2. Approved visitors/parents seeking to enter the building without a face mask will be directed to a PPE station outside the building or to the Principal or designee at school entry ways. No one can enter the building without their mask on.
3. The response to visitors/parents who are seen not wearing a face mask should be supportive and not start off in a confrontational manner.
4. It is recommended that if appropriate, the conversation may include:
 - a. seek to understand why the individual is not wearing their mask,
 - b. remind the visitor/parent about the LPS face mask policy,
 - c. alert the principal or designee if the individual is unable to comply
4. Mask-wearing is not a choice, it is a requirement of anyone in the building. If an adult refuses to comply, then the Principal will address the situation.

Additional Considerations for Students:

Consistent approaches for students who take off their masks or break protocols

Students will inevitably take off their masks or have them slip so they are not covering their nose and/or mouth fully in times and areas that they are required. Staff members will need language and protocols to use when this occurs. Educators will not be able to move in closer than six feet to provide redirection. Non-punitive measures will be more effective than punitive ones, because ultimately only the students have control over whether they keep their mask on. Punitive responses are likely to weaponize non-mask wearing. Students will quickly learn that they cannot be forced to wear masks and that they have the power to provoke dramatic reactions when they take off their masks. School-based behavioral support teams may be helpful in addressing challenges with specific students who repetitively decline to wear their masks to allow educators to focus on instructing their classroom rather than monitoring mask-wearing.

Redirect the student in as minimally a disruptive manner as possible and avoid shaming.

For example, if a student is using a device, is there a way to message the student on the device? Could you gesture covering your face to remind students? Could you do a classwide announcement reminding people to make sure masks are on properly so as to avoid singling a student out? If basic reminders are not working, consider seeking further support with the help of local behavioral support teams.

If the student is eating or drinking, ascertain that this is being done according to [protocol](#). Assure this is happening at the right place, right time, and in the right way – alone, adequately distanced, or in the presence of others who are all masked. If not, communicate the expectations clearly and offer supportive suggestions for behavioral modification.

The student may need a mask break. Allow for expressions of feelings (e.g., “I hate wearing this thing”), validate these feelings (e.g., “Yeah, it gets uncomfortable”), and offer an alternative (e.g., let them know when a mask break is coming up or give them instructions on taking a break safely). In general, mask breaks should be scheduled at regular intervals that all students are aware and reminded of. Additional, individual mask breaks may be necessary for some students at times but care should be taken to design these so that they do not provide inadvertent additional “benefits,” such as a break from classroom work.

If a student is openly defiant and refuses to wear their mask, the student may require a more direct intervention, such as private discussion at a safe distance. Consider having designated areas in the school and professionals available to address these situations, and develop a consistent process for this. These processes should center on refocusing behaviors and keeping learning on track.

Build opportunities for students to take mask breaks. Wearing a mask for hours can put a strain on students. Schedule specific times during the day for students to briefly and safely remove their masks for a more comfortable experience while at school. For elementary students, teachers may benefit from guidance to support their entire classroom with mask breaks for students while ensuring social distancing. In middle and high-school settings, a schoolwide schedule for mask breaks is more likely necessary (considering staggering, social distancing, use of outside space).

Start by reviewing your schedule. When are students already getting breaks from masks throughout the day (e.g., socially distanced lunch without masks, recess outside)? Are there long stretches of time during which students do not have breaks? Plan out scheduled mask breaks as a predictable and integrated part of the school day. *(Note: The American Dermatological Association has suggested mask breaks for 15 minutes at least every four hours can be helpful.)*

Designate an area of the school for individual, one-person-at-a-time mask breaks and allow students to take a break during independent work time. If possible, have mask breaks outdoors while still requiring at least six feet of physical distance. Your school’s administrators should help you identify an appropriate location as well as set a schedule for this.