



SAN MATEO
COUNTY
OFFICE OF
EDUCATION



SAN MATEO
COUNTY HEALTH
All together better.

Face Coverings FAQ

What is a cloth face covering?

A cloth face covering is a material that covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with ties or straps or simply wrapped around the lower face. It can be made of a variety of materials, such as cotton, silk, or linen. A cloth face covering may be factory-made or sewn by hand or can be improvised from household items such as scarves, T-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels.

When must face coverings be worn?

Unless a person is exempt as explained below, face coverings must be used in accordance with CDPH guidelines, particularly in indoor environments, on school buses, and in areas where physical distancing alone is not sufficient to prevent disease transmission. CDPH strongly encourages face coverings (or face shields for very young children) at age 2 or older, so that those who cannot manage face coverings can nonetheless have some additional protection. CDPH guidance requires all adults and children in 3rd grade and above wear face coverings.

Who is exempt from face covering requirements?

- Persons younger than two years old, anyone who has trouble breathing, anyone who is unconscious or incapacitated, and anyone who is otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance.
- Persons who are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- Persons who are obtaining a service involving the nose or face for which temporary removal of the face covering is necessary to perform the service.

What if my student cannot wear a face covering?

The face covering guidance recognizes some students may not be able to wear a face covering for a number of reasons. Students are exempted from the requirement if they are under age 2, have a medical or mental health condition or disability that would impede them from properly wearing or handling a face covering, or when a face covering would inhibit communication with a person who is hearing impaired. If your student cannot wear a face covering due to a medical or mental health condition, you must submit a doctor's note confirming the need for an exemption.

When can a face covering be removed?

A cloth face covering or face shield should be removed for meals, snacks, naptime, or outdoor recreation, or when it needs to be replaced. They may be removed while a student is obtaining a service involving the nose or face for which temporary removal of the face covering is necessary to perform the service. When a cloth face covering is temporarily removed, it should be placed in a clean paper bag (marked with the student's name and date) until it needs to be put on again.

Are students in preschool to second grade wearing face coverings?

Many schools in the county are successfully implementing the required face covering policies for all students, including those in preschool through early elementary.

What will happen if my student refuses to wear a face covering and they are not exempt?

Students who are not exempt from wearing a face covering under CDPH guidelines and who refuse to wear one provided by the school must be excluded from campus. Students who inadvertently fail to bring a face covering to school will be provided one by the school. Students who are excluded from campus for refusing to wear a face covering will be offered alternative educational opportunities.

How can school staff help students wear face coverings?

Staff should assume the position that all students can learn to wear a face covering. Teachers can model and teach students about the proper wearing of a face covering and develop classroom culture that supports and reinforces the wearing of face coverings. Schools should post signage to reinforce the proper wearing of face coverings by everyone on campus.

Should staff wear face shields if students don't wear face coverings?

If a student cannot wear a face covering or face shield, staff working closely with the student should wear a face covering and a face shield. Staff who work in close proximity with students whose special needs require feeding, toileting, and performing nebulizer treatments are recommended to wear a face shield for additional protection.

Are staff required or advised to wear N-95 surgical masks?

No. According to the CDC, N-95 masks or respirators “are not used or needed outside of healthcare settings.” SMCH and other public health agencies also report there is a shortage of N-95 respirators needed for hospitals and healthcare facilities. In addition, according to the CDC, “Before using a respirator or getting fit-tested, workers must have a medical evaluation to make sure that they are able to wear a respirator safely. Workers must pass a fit test to confirm a proper seal before using a respirator in the workplace.”

Are there times when a staff member might not wear a face covering?

In limited situations where face coverings cannot be used for pedagogical or developmental reasons (i.e. communicating or assisting young children or those with special needs), a face shield can be used instead of a cloth face covering while in the classroom as long as the wearer maintains physical distance from others, to the extent practicable. The shield should include a cloth drape attached across the bottom and tucked into the shirt. Staff must return to wearing a face covering outside of the classroom.

Can staff work within six feet of a student if they wear a face covering?

Yes, school staff may work with a student side by side as necessary, as long as both the student and staff member are wearing face coverings. Side by side assistance should not be longer than 15-20 minutes in duration.

How should I care for a face covering?

Face coverings should be washed frequently, ideally after each use, or at least daily. Discard face coverings that no longer cover the nose and mouth, are stretched out, have damaged ties or straps, cannot stay on the face, or have holes or tears in the fabric.