
A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools FAQ 5: Face Masks and PPE

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) has released joint guidance with the Vermont Department of Health on safely reopening schools. This document, [A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#), provides health guidance to school administrators and school personnel as they plan and implement the reopening of schools for the 2020-21 School Year in the context of COVID-19.

This Frequently Asked Questions document responds to follow up questions from educators and administrators and is intended to clarify and expand on the guidance.

Q1. Will students be required to keep masks on outside if NOT physical distancing?

Students need to wear their masks - if they are able to - at all times when they are indoors and in any outdoors situation where they may not be able to keep 6 feet between themselves and others.

Q2. What is the recommendation on how many masks a school should have on hand at any one time?

The Health and Safety Guidance suggests that schools may want to consider having a small supply of pediatric and adult surgical masks to have available for students that develop symptoms at school or on the bus. The state will be providing PPE kits for school nurses and/or COVID-19 Coordinators to make sure they are equipped to handle suspect cases.

Otherwise, districts and individual schools should determine how many masks or facial coverings to have on hand based on their unique needs and instructional disposition.

Q3. Is the state providing PPE? When will districts, families, and staff know that we have sufficient PPE before opening? Who pays for it?

The state has provided ten KN95 masks per school staff member and will continue to evaluate if additional distribution are feasible and necessary. The state will also be distributing more advanced PPE for the use of school nurses or COVID-19 Coordinators for use managing a suspected case of COVID-19.

The state has distributed to districts and independent schools a list of state vendors for purchase of additional PPE and cleaning supplies according to their unique needs based on size and educational disposition.

Q4. How can staff teach phonics with masks, if they do not have access to a mask with a clear window or face shield?

The Health and Safety guidance states in some situations, teachers and staff may prefer to use clear face coverings that cover the nose and wrap securely around the face. Teachers and staff who may consider using clear face coverings include:

- Those who interact with students or staff who are deaf or hard of hearing, per the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)
- Teachers of young students learning to read
- Teachers of students in English as a second language classes
- Teachers of students with disabilities

The use of clear facial shields for adults that cover the eyes, nose, and mouth is less preferable, but allowable. They must meet all of the health guidance of the Vermont Department of Health. Face shields should extend below the chin and to the ears laterally, and there should be no exposed gap between the forehead and the shield's headpiece. Staff who are using face shields should have minimal contact with students and other staff. Students should wear masks and should not wear face shields. It is important to note that it is not known if face shields provide any protection from the spray of respiratory droplets to others. CDC does not recommend the use of face shields as a substitute for masks.

If neither option is available, staff need to continue to wear their cloth face covering when teaching. Videos of individuals making the proper sounds may be a helpful teaching aid.

Q5. How are students and staff going to suffer through the physical discomfort of wearing a mask all day in the first month of school when weather is typically hot and humid, and ventilation is poor in many of our concrete school buildings?

Vermonters are quickly growing accustomed to wearing masks in their day to day lives. In healthy individuals, cloth face coverings and masks do not inhibit the ability to breathe. Individuals who find their cloth face coverings uncomfortable may like to experiment with different kinds of permissible face coverings to find the option that is most comfortable for them.

In compliance with the Strong and Healthy Start Health and Safety Guidance, schools are working to update their HVAC systems and improve ventilation in their schools. From an HVAC and ventilation standpoint, many schools in Vermont will be more comfortable this year than they were last year.