



Northern Lights Public Schools

Mask Guidelines

August 31, 2020

The start of a new school year is always a time of great excitement and anticipation. For many this means changes in routines for students, staff and families. This school year will be no exception as we adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic realities in our communities.

As we return to school, we all share a responsibility to follow safety measures for ourselves and others. While it might not be possible to eliminate all risks of COVID-19 entering our schools, as shared by Alberta Health Services, we know we can minimize the risk of infection and spread. To work towards reducing the risk, Northern Lights Public School has developed a *School Re-Entry Plan* that is based upon Alberta Education's guidance documents as required.

Alberta Health Services has stated that wearing a mask can be an additional measure that students and staff can take to protect others by preventing respiratory droplets from contaminating people, surfaces and/or objects. Furthermore, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, through the [CMOH Order 33-2020 dated August 29, 2020](#), has determined that students in Grades 4 to 12, staff members and visitors must wear a non-medical face mask in schools when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Masks are only one part of the risk mitigation strategy implemented in schools and facilities in the school division. The effectiveness of a risk mitigation strategy includes the use of a variety of approaches to reduce risk, including:

- staying home when sick, isolating immediately if you have COVID-19 symptoms including cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat;
- washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- practicing physical distancing and maintaining cohort integrity;
- sanitizing hands and high-touch surfaces; and
- wearing a mask (reusable/washable cloth masks or disposable non-medical masks).

Supporting Mask Use

As we move forward with wearing masks in schools as mandated by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, we recognize that our students may have little or no experience with safety practices such as physical distancing and mask wearing. As we would with any other learning, school staff, administration and supervisors will assess each student's level of understanding and provide them with the teaching, guidance, coaching, corrective behavior supports and encouragement at an age appropriate level, to ensure safety for themselves and their school community. It is our expectation that staff and parents/guardians will support all risk mitigation practices, including the wearing of masks as per school and Northern Lights Public Schools expectations.

In an effort to provide a high standard of care and a safe learning environment, the refusal to wear a non-medical mask as per the following guidelines will not be accepted. This is to ensure the safety of all individuals in Northern Lights Public Schools and our communities. In the event students repeatedly refuse to wear a mask, students shall face disciplinary action that may include but is not limited to: isolation, parental contact, suspension or expulsion. In the event staff repeatedly refuse to wear a mask, they may face a variety of disciplinary actions up to and including termination.

Mask Exemptions

According to Alberta Education, exemptions to mask requirement for staff and students in grades 4 to 12 include:

- persons who are unable to place, use or remove a non-medical face mask without assistance
- persons unable to wear a non-medical face mask due to a mental or physical concern or limitation
- persons consuming food or drink in designated areas
- persons engaged in physical exercise
- persons sitting at a desk or table
 - within a classroom or place where the instruction, course or program of study is taking place, and
 - where the desks, table and chairs are arrangement in a manner
 - to prevent persons who are seated from facing each other, and
 - to allow the greatest possible distance between seated persons
- persons providing care or assistance to a person with a disability where a non-medical face mask would hinder that caregiving or assistance
- persons separated from every other person by a physical barrier

In the event an individual is unable to wear a non-medical mask due to sensory, mental, physical or other reasons, they may apply for an exemption using the appropriate form which can be accessed through the student's school or the employee's supervisor. Northern Lights Public Schools will give serious consideration to each request and will make a determination on a case by case basis in as timely a fashion as possible. If necessary, the applicant may be requested to provide a doctor's note.

School Principals will be responsible for deciding whether students should be exempt from wearing a non-medical mask. In the event a parent or student disagrees with the decision they should contact Blair Norton, Director of Human Resources and potentially follow [Administrative Procedure 143 Dispute Resolution Process for Parents](#).

Employees requesting an exemption will inform their supervisor, the supervisor will forward the request and form to Blair Norton, Director of Human Resources for a decision. In the event that

the employee disagrees with the decision they will follow [Administrative Procedure 144 Dispute Resolution Process for Staff](#).

Acceptable Masks

To be acceptable, a mask should fit securely over the nose and mouth and not have large gaps between the mask and your chin, cheeks or nose where droplets can escape. Face shields are not considered to be non-medical face masks. Face coverings such as scarves or bandanas are not considered to be non-medical masks. It is important to comply with other personal preventative practices such as frequent hand hygiene and physical distancing as much as possible.

Provision of Masks

The Government of Alberta is distributing reusable cloth masks to students and staff. Northern Lights Public Schools is providing additional disposable masks to schools and the transportation departments, as well as providing additional PPE to schools to ensure safety protocols can be met. Students may bring their own masks provided they meet the standards of non-medical masks as described by Alberta Health Services.

Mask Use and Storage

Staff should educate students on how to properly put on and remove a reusable mask, emphasizing:

- washing hands or applying hand sanitizer before handling
- handling masks by the ties/ear loops/elastics
- avoiding touching the mask once it is on
- changing masks when they become wet or soiled

Reusable masks that are not damp or dirty that will be re-worn prior to washing should be stored in a clean, breathable bag or container.

Who must wear a mask?

- school and district staff
- students (mandatory for Grades 4 to 12, optional for Grades K to 3)
- staff in Out of School Care programs
- parents/guardians
- guests
- service providers
- all visitors entering the school

Who should not wear a mask?

- persons unable to place, use or remove a non-medical face mask without assistance (due to age, ability, or developmental status – see exemptions process)
- persons unable to wear a non-medical face mask due to a mental or physical concern or limitation (see exemptions process)
- persons consuming food or drink in designated areas

- persons providing care or assistance to a person with a disability where a non-medical mask would hinder that caregiving or assistance
- persons engaging in services that require the temporary removal of non-medical mask (articulation, pronunciation skills, etc.) with other risk mitigation strategies in place

When must masks be worn?

Grade 4 to 12, Staff, and Any Other Visitors or Personnel in the Building:

- while being transported on a school bus
- when entering and exiting the school building
- while in shared school spaces and high traffic areas (bathrooms, hallways, etc.)
- when any individual is engaging with an individual who is not part of their identified cohort(s)
- when not seated in classroom or place of instruction in a manner where desks, tables and chairs are arranged to prevent personal who are seated from facing each other and allowing the greatest possible distance possible between seated persons
- during brief, casual interactions where physical distancing is not possible or is unpredictable

Grades K-3:

- while travelling on a school bus (strongly recommended)
- when COVID-19 symptomatic students moved to an infirmary and supporting staff are waiting for the student to be picked up

When are masks not required?

Grades K to 3:

- masks are not required for Grades K to 3 students, but can be worn provided they are able to place, use, or remove a mask
- it is expected that when Grades K to 3 students are in a classroom or place of instruction they will be seated, as much as reasonably possible and age appropriate, in a manner to prevent students from facing each other and allowing reasonable distance possible between seated students

Grades 4 to 12 and Staff:

- when seated in classroom or place of instruction in a manner where desks, tables and chairs are arranged in a manner to prevent personal who are seated from facing each other and allowing the greatest possible distance possible between seated persons
- the teacher may remove mask to provide instruction provided teacher remains within a designated teaching space
- during outdoor cohort recess breaks where the integrity of the cohort is preserved and other transmission risk mitigation strategies are used
- during any planned mask break where other safety measures are implemented
- when eating or drinking in their designation eating location (other risk mitigation strategies in place)

- when engaging in an athletic or fitness activity (physical distance measures in place, or the guidelines from the Alberta Government's *Guidance for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation-Stage 2* document are followed)
- when staff are working with students with special education needs where wearing a face covering would hinder the delivery of program (other risk mitigation strategies in place)
- when separated from every other person by a physical barrier

What other risk mitigations strategies are in place to reduce transmission of COVID-19?

- staying home when sick
- isolating immediately if COVID-19 symptoms arise
- physical distancing
- washing hands with soap and water
- sanitizing hands
- practicing respiratory etiquette
- sanitizing high touch surfaces
- maintaining cohort integrity
- limiting non-essential guests in the building
- staggering entry, recess and lunch, and pick-up times
- designating entrances and traffic flow patterns in hallways
- displaying signage to support the above strategies