

USE OF PROTECTIVE FACE COVERINGS (MASKS) TO MITIGATE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

In accordance with the *State Health Commissioner Order of Public Health Emergency: Statewide Requirement to Wear Masks in K-12 Schools*, along with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Alexandria Health Department (AHD), ACPS requires employees, students and visitors to wear protective face coverings/masks while inside its facilities and vehicles until this regulation is rescinded by the School Board.

The use of face coverings is intended to:

- Adhere to mitigation strategies that minimize the spread of COVID-19; and
- Prioritize safety precautions for the benefit of ACPS students, staff and visitors.

I. DEFINITION

Face covering/mask: an item normally made of cloth or various other materials (with elastic bands or cloth ties) that is secured over the wearer's nose and mouth to contain or reduce the spread of potentially infectious respiratory secretions at the source (i.e., the person's nose and mouth). Face coverings may not be neck gaiters nor have exhalation valves or vents, which allow virus particles to escape. Wearing a face covering benefits the wearer, as well as others.

II. GENERAL PROVISIONS

- A. All individuals aged two and older must wear a face covering while inside ACPS facilities or vehicles unless an exemption or approved accommodation applies as outlined in Section III of this regulation.
- B. If a student, staff member or essential visitor/volunteer (as defined in Policy KK: *School Visitors*) does not have a protective face covering that meets the definition above, one will be provided.
- C. All students and staff will receive appropriate training in the use of protective face coverings.
- D. Students, staff, and visitors will be encouraged to wear face coverings in crowded outdoor settings or during outdoor activities that involve sustained close contact with other people.
- E. Accommodation requests are not automatically granted, must follow the procedures outlined in Section III below, and if approved, remain subject to review and adjustment.

III. EXEMPTIONS OR ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

A. Students

Limited exceptions to the face covering/mask requirement for students occur:

- When, and only for the time that temporary removal of the face covering is necessary, to eat, drink, exercise, participate in a religious ritual, or play a musical instrument (e.g., wind or brass instrument), at the direction, or with the specific approval of, a staff member; or
- When a student is having a medical emergency and is having difficulty breathing; or
- When a student has been expressly granted an accommodation regarding face coverings by ACPS due to a documented, sincerely held religious objection. (Accommodations may involve physical separation of the student where feasible, exemption from certain activities, or virtual education as determined by staff); or
- When a student has been expressly granted an accommodation regarding face coverings by ACPS as evidenced by written documentation from the student's health care provider that not wearing a face covering is medically necessary. ACPS will contact the health care provider for additional information as part of its verification and determination process. Such accommodations may be related to a documented health condition, disability or communication impairment, and may need to be considered as part of the 504 process. Adaptations and alternatives should be considered whenever possible to increase the feasibility of wearing a face covering or to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading, if it is not medically recommended to wear one. (Accommodations may involve physical separation of the student where feasible, exemption from certain activities, or virtual education as determined by staff.) ACPS will connect families with public health resources for any student who requires documentation for a medical accommodation but does not have a regular health care provider.

Parents/guardians may contact the Department of Student Services and Equity at student_services@acps.k12.va.us to apply for a documented student accommodation.

B. Staff Members

Limited exceptions to the face covering/mask requirement for employees occur when a staff member is alone in a closed room or:

- When, and only for the time that temporary removal of the face covering is necessary, to eat, drink, exercise, participate in a religious ritual, or play a musical instrument (e.g., wind or brass instrument); or

- When a staff member is having a medical emergency and is having difficulty breathing; or
- When a staff member has been expressly granted an accommodation regarding face coverings by ACPS that is necessary to the performance of the staff member's duties (e.g., a teacher while instructing students with certain disabilities); or
- When a staff member has been expressly granted an accommodation regarding face coverings by ACPS due to a documented, sincerely held religious objection; or
- When a staff member has been expressly granted an accommodation regarding face coverings by ACPS that is due to a medical reason, as evidenced by written documentation from the individual's health care provider. ACPS will support employees by providing information regarding additional health resources if needed.

Employees may contact the Department of Human Resources at hr@acps.k12.va.us with questions regarding COVID-related Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation requests. In instances where a reasonable accommodation cannot be made, the employee may be required to take leave without pay, or may be separated from service.

The limited accommodations for staff members outlined in this subsection also apply to "essential visitors/volunteers" as defined in Policy KK.

Established: September 9, 2021

Legal Refs.: Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, §§ 22.1-178, 22.1-300, 22.1-301, 54.1-2952.2, 54.1-2957.02.

Interim Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Virginia PreK-12 Schools, Virginia Department of Health (VDH), (July 2021; updated August 2021), <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2021/03/Interim-Guidance-to-K-12-School-Reopening.pdf>.

Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), (Updated August 2021), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>.

State Health Commissioner Order of Public Health Emergency Statewide Requirement to Wear Masks in K-12 Schools, (August 12, 2021), https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/134/2021/08/PHE-Order_K-12_8-12-2021.pdf.

United States Department of Education: <https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>.

Virginia Department of Health: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/>.

Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/covid-19-faq.html>.

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/CFC_Guide_for_School_Administrators.pdf)

[ncov/downloads/community/CFC_Guide_for_School_Administrators.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/CFC_Guide_for_School_Administrators.pdf).

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>.

Cross Refs.:	GBE	Staff Health
	JHCC	Communicable Diseases
	JHCF	Student Wellness
	JHCF-R	Student Wellness Guidelines
	KG	Community Use of School Facilities
	KG-R	Community Use of School Facilities Regulations and Application
	KK	School Visitors