



# FAQs: Masks and Face Coverings

## Why Masks and Face Coverings?

The Hingham Public School District is committed to providing a safe environment as schools reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to public health experts, one of the best ways to stop the spread of coronavirus and to keep members of our school community safe is the use of face masks. Masks or face coverings are among the most critical components of risk reduction since the primary route of transmission for COVID-19 is respiratory. Wearing masks/face coverings, along with proper hand hygiene and social distancing can help to mitigate transmission of COVID-19. The following protocols are developed with guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH).

## Are there rules and policies to follow?

### Face Mask

The Hingham School Committee requires masks/face coverings that cover the nose and mouth for all students and staff per [school committee policy](#). Students with medical or other behavioral, developmental, or health-related conditions who are unable to wear masks/face coverings may be exempted and may have the option of wearing a face shield.

In accordance with MA Department of Public Health and CDC guidelines face coverings must:

- Cover the nose and mouth;
- Fit securely and comfortably against the side of the face;
- Be secured with ties or ear loops;
- Allow for breathing without restriction;
- Be able to be laundered without damage or change of shape;
- Be made of at least two layers of material;
- Face coverings may not have an exhalation valve or vent or be loose on the neck. Gaiters are not permitted.

As of October 5, 2020

Clear masks that meet the above criteria are acceptable and are encouraged in particular settings including when an individual in the class is deaf or hard of hearing and other settings when the ability to see the full facial expressions is especially beneficial.

## Dress Code

Masks can be an expression of your personality similar to the clothes you wear each day. We encourage you to embrace your creativity while keeping others safe and not causing distractions. Face coverings are subject to the dress code in the Student Handbook and School Committee policy. The dress code prohibits attire that is destructive to school property, does not comply with health requirements and/or causes disorder or disruption.

## Discipline

The Principal or Superintendent shall determine the consequences of non-compliance of the face mask policy by students and/or staff.

## Where do I get a mask?

Families and staff are encouraged and expected to provide masks/face coverings for students and themselves. Your mask should fit appropriately when you are speaking and be comfortable.

Everyone has a unique shaped face and you will know the best fit and comfort for you.

- Please bring at least two masks per day when in school. This will allow changing a mask if it gets moist from speaking for an extended period or other accidents.
- Extra disposable masks will be available in the event a student forgets their mask or a mask is lost, soiled or damaged.
- Teachers in need of specialized masks and face coverings will be provided with them.
- If a family is unable to afford masks, please contact your building principal.

## Are there exceptions to the mask policy?

There may be a rare situation when an individual is excused from the mask requirement. Examples include anyone who has a medical, behavioral or other challenge making it unsafe to wear a face mask. Face shields or other physical barriers are encouraged as an alternative, if appropriate. A written note from a physician, certifying that it is unsafe to wear a mask, is required for a requested exemption and must be approved by the building principal in consultation with the school nurse. Parents may not excuse their child from the face mask requirement by signing a waiver.

## When will mask breaks occur?

Mask breaks will be scheduled throughout the day. The building principals will establish schedules and procedures for mask breaks since each building is unique with the number of students, staff and facility design. Our goal is for safety and efficient timing for all.

During mask breaks students and staff will respect each other's space by maintaining a minimum of six feet of distance, with greater separation whenever feasible. Student mask breaks will occur under the supervision of an adult. Paper bags will be provided to students to store their mask during the break. Mask breaks will take place outside and out of the classroom when possible and weather permitting.

Students and staff will be instructed in the proper removal and placement of masks when 6 feet apart which includes:

- Sanitize hands before removing mask
- Remove mask, handling only by the ties or ear loops
- Do not touch the outside or inside of the part covering the face
- Once removed, hold the outer edges of the mask, fold the mask in half with the inside of the mask touching and place in a labeled bag or container
- Sanitize hands before replacing the mask

## Are masks required on buses?

Masks/face coverings must be worn by everyone on a school bus at all times. Bus drivers and bus monitors will assist students to ensure students are wearing them appropriately. Disposable masks are available on each bus if needed.

## What consequences if any would be appropriate for children who do not wear masks appropriately (over their nose and mouths) to assure they do in the future?

The principal will address any student who does not adhere to the mask policy in the same manner as any discipline issue. Students are expected to adhere to the mask policy. The schools do not want to be in a position to discipline students for not appropriately adhering to all health and safety protocols. If a student refuses to wear a mask, they may be sent home for remote-only learning. We are relying on parents to work with their students to ensure proper mask usage. If a student refuses to wear a mask, they will be sent home.

## Should all of Hingham wear masks?

During this pandemic, evidence shows that wearing masks is a non-invasive health measure that promotes all of our safety. **We are a community.** Each of us brings our own narrative to what wearing a mask means. Today, we know that wearing a mask keeps those around us safer and allows us to be together. Wearing a mask is a medical issue and protection. We expect that all those who can medically do so will wear masks.

For a number of reasons, mask wearing may increase some people's anxiety and it is important to be sensitive and aware of possible trauma history. When we wear masks we lose some of the elements that can increase trust and connection: our facial expressions are hidden and must be guessed or assumed. A few cannot wear masks due to medical issues. Students with learning challenges surrounding mask wearing will be respected and provided with instructional opportunities. **We are in this together and will be wearing masks to keep everyone as safe as we can.**

### References:

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

Fultz, K. (2020). Being trauma informed in a covid-19 world. Retrieved on 14 August 2020 from Being Trauma Informed in a COVID-19 World and resources for domestic violence .

Thomas, A. (2020). Why I don't feel safe wearing a face mask. Retrieved on 15 August 2020 from Boston Globe OpEd .