

Wednesday, August 18, 2021

Dear Avonworth Parents & Caregivers,

As the Avonworth staff prepares to welcome all students to a new school year on Tuesday, August 24, we want to continue to work with you as valued partners to help make this start the best it can be for each child.

To achieve that goal, this communication is intended as a means of clarifying key points that are important about current universal mask requirements and procedures for K-12 students. This information can also be referenced in the Avonworth Health & Safety Plan, 2021-2022 Return to School Plan, and in the COVID-19: Addendum to the Student Handbook.

Key points from these District resources include the following considerations:

What factors influenced the decision to require K-12 universal masking?

- The District's primary goal is to have students in school with limited to no disruptions to learning.
- The Health & Safety Plan expects the school district to explain, to the greatest extent practicable, how it will implement prevention and mitigation policies in line with the most up-to-date CDC guidance.
- Universal masking for all students, staff, and visitors in K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status, is the current guidance provided by all leading health organizations including the CDC, ACHD, AAP, and PA DOH.
- From June and early July to August 16, 2021, Allegheny County moved from a low COVID transmission level to a high level of COVID transmission.

What is the goal of universal masking?

- To protect staff, students, and visitors by decreasing transmission of the virus.
- To maintain in-person instruction for students by reducing the risk of quarantine-based interruptions.

When are students not required to wear a mask?

- Eating or drinking when spaced at least 6 ft apart;
- Outside for recess;
- Playing a brass or woodwind instrument;
- If wearing a mask creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task;
- When at least 6 feet apart during a "mask break."

Key points for consideration continued.

How can wearing a mask be a benefit to my child with respect to quarantine?

- Per CDC and ACHD, students who are masked and would otherwise be considered a “close contact” **do not need to be quarantined** if within 3’ - 6’ of a COVID-19 positive individual.

Are masks going to be required for the entire school year?

- The Board and administration will continue to monitor the level of COVID transmission in Allegheny County and in our schools and follow guidance or orders regarding any changes to the current Health & Safety Plan.
- The District’s COVID Working Group will be evaluating potential metrics to consider with regard to making recommendations for changes to the current Health & Safety Plan.

What does the CDC define as a proper mask?

- Two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric;
- Completely covers the nose and mouth;
- Fits snugly against the sides of the face without gaps;
- Has a nose wire to prevent air from leaking out of the top of the mask.
- A gaiter with two layers.

What steps are required if my child cannot wear a mask for a medical condition. What steps are required if there is a need for my child to wear a mask other than one that meets the CDC definition of a proper mask?

- A child’s parent/caregiver will be asked to provide medical documentation from a doctor of medicine (MD) or doctor of osteopathic medicine (DO).
- The principal will invite the parent or guardian to participate in a team meeting at the school to discuss the need and potential for creating a 504 plan to support the child.

What procedure will be followed if a student arrives at school without wearing a mask or refuses to wear a mask?

- Students will be provided with a new mask that is in accordance with the CDC definition.
- If a student refuses to wear a mask, the parent or caregiver will be called and invited to a conference with the principal and other staff to discuss and resolve the situation in the best interest of the student and others.
- Depending on the circumstances when a student refuses to comply with the District’s masking requirements, a school administrator will contact the student’s parent or caregiver and the student will be sent home.

Key points for consideration continued.

What are the mask requirements for student athletes?

- Masks will be worn by student athletes when not competing during indoor competitions or practices.
- Masks will be worn by student athletes when traveling on a school bus for competitions or other events.
- Masks will not be worn by student athletes for outdoor practices or competitions.
- Masks will not be worn by student athletes when actively participating in competition or practice.

Information on the status of COVID-19 in our schools and County, as well as other pertinent information will be forwarded to you each Friday.

As always, your cooperation and support are appreciated.

Sincerely,

Cheryl A.Griffith, Ed.D.
Acting Superintendent

Jeff M.Hadley, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent