



The Diocese of Youngstown desires for all of its Catholic School students to have in person learning without interruption for the coming school year.

**During a period of a temporary mask mandate, when does a person have to wear a mask?**

- When moving around in the halls or classrooms or going from place to place.
- When seated in a stationery position closer than three feet apart.
- When a school makes a determination that a situation would be safer if a mask should be worn. i.e music class; close group collaboration, playing board games during indoor recess, etc..

**During a period of a temporary mask mandate, when does a mask not need to be worn?**

- When outdoors, at recess, or in gym class.
- When seated three feet apart or more.

**Why has the Diocese of Youngstown added a TEMPORARY mandatory mask policy to its COVID-19 protocols for all in the school building during school hours right now?**

**1. Quarantine and isolation rules for exposure in schools**

- In early August, quarantine rules for exposure in schools were released. These have been shared with all in past communications but can be found here: <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/covid-19-fact-sheet-k-12-exposure-and-quarantine.pdf>
- We do not yet know how and if these may affect school attendance, and this is a concern for school administrators. A few weeks of universal masking in addition to other protocols will allow school to get established in the school year without concern of exposure quarantines.

**2. The rise in COVID-19 cases in Ohio as school begins.**

- We have had a direct conversation with Ohio Department of Health Director Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, reviewed communications from the various health departments that serve our schools, and looked at the data for the rise in cases in Ohio from two weeks ago.
- All Ohio counties, including our six, are in the high risk category as of this week's data. That is defined as more than 100 cases per 100,000 residents.

County	Cases per 100,000 8/5	Cases per 100,000 8/12	Cases per 100,000 8/19
Ashtabula	56.6	87.4	107.0
Columbiana	116.8	172.7	333.7
Mahoning	110.6	158.3	220.4
Portage	116.3	167.4	211.7
Stark	96.3	140.3	216.1
Trumbull	105.1	162.1	198.0

- The Ohio Coronavirus Dashboard tracks many different metrics. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/dashboards/overview>

### **3. Return to Normalcy**

- While still keeping all of the layered protections in place, school routines are not going to be as restrictive as last year. Having a temporary mask mandate allows those routines to be established with more confidence. Our schools are still in uncharted territory as this disease has changed and evolved.

#### **When will the temporary mask mandate be lifted?**

Several criteria will be used to lift a mandate by county and by school.

When a county dips below 100 cases per 100,000 people two weeks in a row, (keeping in mind that only drops a county to substantial risk level), the local health department will be consulted for any additional information for the area. The circumstances in each school will also be taken into account. Mandates will be lifted by school and county.

If the current predictions based on the trends they are seeing across the country hold true, the Ohio Department of Health anticipates that this current rise should dip again by mid-September.

#### **What if my child is medically unable to wear a mask, even for the shortened amount of time required for this year's temporary mask mandate?**

The same procedure as last year is in place. A signed statement from a child's pediatrician with the reason for his or her inability to wear a mask at all should be given to the principal and school nurse.

#### **What kind of mask should be worn?**

Face coverings should fit snugly, yet comfortably, and be worn horizontally. Coverings should cover one's nose, mouth, and chin at all times. While masks are preferred, neck gaiters may also be worn if permitted by the school. The colors and design for masks are dictated by school dress code policy.

#### **When will things turn to "normal"?**

- The strict routines that were in place last year are already being lifted with the layered protocols for safety in effect. The temporary mask mandate assists with this at the beginning of the year.
- Our schools are permitted to begin scheduling things that have had to be put on hold due to COVID restrictions last year. Adhering to as many layers of protocols as possible allows this to happen.

#### **When the temporary mask mandate moves to a voluntary policy for masking, will masks ever need to be worn?**

Our Revised COVID-19 addresses this.

- On the school bus, as it falls under federal law as public transportation.

- For a period of time in the event of a school COVID-19 outbreak, or the local health department deems it necessary due to local circumstances.
- On field trips unless outdoors, and for any other activity a school determines may be prudent.

### What if my child is exposed to COVID-19 outside of school?

In this case, the family will follow the direction of the local health department regarding any needed quarantine or isolation and the school will comply with their directions. The rules referenced above are for exposure in school during the school day.

### It doesn't make sense that my child may need to wear a mask inside during the school day and not be required anywhere else.

Agreed. That is the dilemma that our school administrators face as they try to insure a solid year of in person engagement of learning for all students.

- Outside of our school walls we do not know where the students have been or to whom they may have been exposed. We are aware that most children have been and will continue to be out into the world with few or any protocols. That is a parent's decision and we respect that.
- But in our buildings we also have children who are immunocompromised, who have family members who are, and whose parents can't control the school environment for them as they might in other outside settings.

### What does faith have to do with it?

The decision to add a temporary mask mandate to the additional protocols in place at this time reflects what we feel is prudent healthwise for our schools at this moment in order to keep our students in school. It also reflects our responsibility to the school communities as a whole for the benefit of the common good. This is not an attempt to limit anyone's freedom, but an attempt to ensure the freedom of all to safely return to school and hopefully stay there. We have taken into consideration the health guidance we have been given. As Catholic schools, our faith also informs our decisions.

In addition to health concerns for the ability to stay in school, the decision to implement a **temporary** mask mandate in our schools was also a pro-life decision by Bishop Bonnar, myself, and the Office of Catholic Schools staff. We have a responsibility to protect the majority of our students who are not vaccinated during the time that they are in our care.

### What should parents do?

Parents have the right to choose the environment that they feel is best for their child. As you make your decision during this period of temporary masking we ask that you consider the following:

- This is temporary.
- The mask protocols and school routines from last year will look different.
- The adults in our children's lives are the ones that shape how children respond to situations. We respectfully ask that we all weather this next few weeks together, assuring the children that we believe this is a temporary situation for masks to be worn indoors during the school day. And at times we may need to choose actions that benefit others.