



## *Back-to-School COVID-19 Q & A*

*Fall 2021*

### **Questions & Answers**

#### **Where will HPS require masks this fall?**

Masks will be required for students and staff at all PreK-8 schools. Masks are strongly recommended, but not required for 9-12 schools.

Masks are required in all indoor areas in PreK-8 school buildings. Please note the following:

- Face coverings are not required when outdoors.
- Face coverings are not required when eating/drinking while maintaining physical distancing as each site/school allows.
- In some circumstances to enhance instructional delivery, staff may lower face covering for a short period of time (several minutes) while teaching, presenting, and speaking or providing directions if they can maintain appropriate distance (6ft) from others.
- When working alone, not with students or members of the public, staff may remove face coverings.
- To be determined by staff, there may be opportunities for students for routine “mask breaks” throughout the day, if appropriate distancing can be maintained.
- Health Exemption:
  - Student: Provide a contraindicated document from your medical provider to your school nurse.
  - Staff/Adult: Provide a contraindicated document from your medical provider to your site principal and District Office HR.

#### **What types of masks or other face coverings are allowed?**

For details regarding face coverings (types and proper use), HPS follows CDC [guidance](#). Consistent with last year’s mask guidance, gators, scarves and bandanas are not allowed.

#### **Will masks be required on school buses?**

Yes. Per federal law, passengers and drivers on school buses must wear a mask, including on buses operated by public and private school systems.

**(Continued on next page...)**

**Will HPS require masks for 9-12 schools?**

HPS leaders continue to evaluate the district's COVID response protocols daily in coordination with public health officials, local healthcare providers, and the Helena School District Board of Trustees. Any proposed change to masking guidelines for grades 9-12 would be presented to the Board of Trustees and would need Board approval. Parents will be notified of any changes to mask requirements no later than 3 p.m. on Friday for the upcoming school week.

**When will the PreK-8 mask requirement be lifted?**

The PreK-8 mask requirement will remain in effect as long as local transmission rates remain at the "high" or "substantial" level. These guidelines may be modified, reduced, or extended. Factors that will be used in decision making include, but are not limited to, the local transmission rate (new cases per 100,000 over a 7-day rolling average), local vaccination rate by age group, and district data related to school-associated positive COVID cases and/or transmission.

When there are changes to HPS mask guidelines, parents will be notified no later than 3 p.m. on Friday for the upcoming school week.

HPS is committed to a COVID-19 response plan that makes sense for our community and will continue to monitor local conditions and adjust our safety recommendations accordingly, including those around face coverings.

**Will visitors be allowed at PreK-8 schools this fall?**

While masks are mandated at the PreK-8 level, HPS will suspend visitors, parents, volunteers, and presenters within the school. Parents are still welcome to come to school and do business at the front office while masked. Thank you for your understanding.

**Will students still have remote or blended learning options for school attendance?**

In order to return students to the classroom full-time, the district has returned our teachers to the classroom full-time. HPS has entered a partnership with third-party providers for its Online Learning Alternative Program. The provider for grades K-12 is Edgenuity. Grades 9-12 will also use the Montana Digital Academy. All Edgenuity and Montana Digital Academy teachers are certified by the State of Montana.

If you are interested in participating in the Online Learning Alternative Program, please contact your child's school administrators asap for assistance with the application process.

**What is my student is sick or is identified as a close contact?**

If your student is sick, please keep them home and seek a COVID test asap if conditions warrant. Please see our **symptom** guidance.

If your student is identified as a COVID-19 close contact by your county health department, please follow your county health department quarantine **instructions**. If your student tests positive and is identified as a COVID-19 case, please carefully follow county isolation orders.

Please see the following chart for further detail.



## CLOSE CONTACT RETURN-TO-SCHOOL & WORK PROTOCOL

If you are identified as a **close contact**, it means you were within 6 feet of a **case** (person who is positive for COVID-19) for a cumulative period of 15 minutes over a 24-hour period.

The Helena School District will follow these steps for returning students and adults who are identified as a COVID-19 close contact to school or work.

**Please note that masks are required for all PK-8 students and staff. Masks are strongly recommended at all times for 9-12 students and staff.**

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## Return to school/work guidelines for COVID Close Contacts ...

