Back-to-School 2020-21: Mask Guidance for Parents

Face coverings or masks are an important tool in preventing the spread of COVID-19. They can be safely worn by all children 2 years of age and older, including most children with underlying health conditions, with rare exception. Masks are especially important when physical distancing is hard to do, such as in schools and other indoor community settings.

To be effective, masks should:
• Have multiple layers of fabric
• Cover both the nose and mouth
• Fit snugly but comfortably against the sides of the face
• Be secured with ear loops or ties
• Allow for unrestricted breathing
• Be washed and dried carefully after use

Wearing a mask at school
Students in Grades 4-12 are required to wear a non-medical or cloth mask indoors in school, including in hallways and during classes, and on school buses.

Students in younger grades are strongly recommended to wear a non-medical or cloth mask and to follow any school policies that may require wearing one.

Students with sensory or breathing difficulties may be exempted from wearing a mask, guided by school policies.

Prepare your child for wearing a mask at school
• Explain to your child why it is important to wear a mask at school and how it protects other people from getting sick.
• Talk to your child about other people who may not be able to wear a mask for medical reasons (e.g., asthma).
• As a family, model wearing masks in the community where required or where physical distancing is hard to do.
• For younger school-aged children, use play to normalize wearing masks. Put masks on their toys together, put a mask on yourself, get siblings and relatives to wear them and do fun activities with masks on. Play a game while wearing a mask. Show pictures or videos of other kids wearing masks. Look in the mirror together when putting masks on.
  • Practice removing your mask, placing it in a resealable container or paper bag, then have a snack or drink and putting it back on for the next activity.
  • Start with wearing a mask for a few minutes and increase the time each day.
  • Introduce your child to masks with a variety of materials, prints and textures, and let them choose one they like. You may have to try a few different kinds of masks to learn which kind your child finds most comfortable.
  • Use positive reinforcement when your child wears their mask properly. It takes time to get used to wearing a mask, so they should feel proud of learning this new habit.
Make sure your child knows:

• How to properly put on and take off their mask.
• To wash or sanitize their hands before putting on and taking off their mask and after they take it off.
• Not to touch their mask while wearing it, and if they do, they should wash or sanitize their hands before and after.
• That cloth masks should not be worn if they are wet. A wet cloth mask can make it hard to breathe.
• That they should never share or swap masks with anyone.

Mask Tips for School

• Your child will need to wear a clean mask each day, so if your child will be wearing a cloth mask, it is a good idea to purchase (or make) at least five.
• Masks should be clearly labelled with your child’s name.
• Cloth masks should be washed after every day of use or if visibly soiled.
• Pack extra masks in your child’s backpack in case a back-up is needed during the school day.

When can my child take off their mask at school?

Outdoor times like recess can be used as opportunities to provide students with breaks from wearing masks. Masks should not be worn when participating in physical activity indoors or when eating or drinking.

What should my child do with their mask when they take it off?

When your child is not wearing their mask, they should put it in a resealable container or paper bag labelled with their name. This will keep the mask from being contaminated when it is not being worn and keep the mask from contaminating surfaces or objects.

References


Learn more at:
wdgpublichealth.ca/backtoschool