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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What are the benefits to being fully vaccinated for students in school?

COVID-19 vaccines help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19. Getting vaccinated may also protect people around you, particularly those at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Fully vaccinated students may remain in school and avoid interruptions to in-person education, even if they are exposed to someone with COVID-19, so long as they are without symptoms.

2. Why does the K-12 guidance state that masks should be worn indoors?

Masks are one of the most effective and simplest safety mitigation layers to prevent in-school transmission of COVID-19. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is primarily transmitted via airborne particles. Masks limit the spread of the virus in the air from infected persons and protect others exposed to these particles. Masking indoors in K-12 schools is recommended by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) and by the [CDC](#) in its Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools.

Universal masking prevents outbreaks and permits modified quarantine under certain conditions in K-12 settings, supporting more instructional time and minimizing missed school days for students. Additionally, universal masking indoors is critical to enabling all schools to offer and provide full in-person instruction to all students without minimum physical distancing requirements.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) will continue to assess conditions on an ongoing basis, and will determine no later than November 1, 2021, whether to update mask requirements or recommendations. Indicators, conditions, and science review will include vaccination coverage status, in consideration of whether vaccines are available for children under 12, community case and hospitalization rates, outbreaks, and ongoing vaccine effectiveness against circulating variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

3. Is a doctor's note required to obtain a mask exemption? Is parental or self-attestation permitted to obtain a mask exemption?

As per [CDPH Guidance on Face Coverings](#), “persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents wearing a mask” as well as “persons who are hearing impaired” are exempt from mask requirements.

Assessing for exemption due to a medical condition, mental health condition, disability that prevents wearing a mask, or hearing impairment is a medical determination and therefore must be made by a physician, nurse practitioner, or other licensed medical professional practicing under the license of a physician. Self-attestation and parental attestation for mask exemptions due to the conditions do not constitute medical determinations.

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4. Do masks need to be worn on school buses?

[CDPH Face Coverings Guidance](#) requires that everyone (regardless of vaccination status) use masks on school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems. In addition, [CDC's Order](#) requiring the wearing of masks by all people on public transportation conveyances also includes school buses. Passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems, subject to the exclusions and exemptions.

5. If students take a school trip off-campus to an indoor location, do vaccinated students need to wear a mask indoors if the location they are visiting does not require vaccinated people to wear masks?

If students are participating in a school event or being supervised by school staff, face mask guidance for K-12 settings must be followed regardless of location.

6. Why do vaccinated teachers need to wear a mask?

COVID-19 prevention strategies in K-12 schools are designed to protect people who are not fully vaccinated. Many students are not fully vaccinated. Due to the potential for increased spread from highly transmissible circulating variants and that face masks remain one of the most effective and simplest safety mitigation layers, adults – including those who are fully vaccinated – in K-12 school settings are required to mask when sharing indoor spaces with students. Universal indoor masking of teachers, regardless of vaccination status, is also recommended by the [CDC](#).

7. Why does the guidance permit students with known exposures to COVID-19 to remain in-school?

Scientific research and experience from around the country demonstrate that when both parties are wearing facemasks appropriately at the time of a school-based exposure to COVID-19, in-school transmission is unlikely, and students can safely continue in-person learning. When students remain in school after exposure because the student and the individual with COVID-19 were wearing masks appropriately, this is called modified quarantine. Modified quarantine involves a period of time during which students may continue in-person instruction but should refrain from all extracurricular activities at school, including sports, and activities within the community setting. Testing during modified quarantine provides an additional layer of safety and monitoring. Modified quarantine allows for less missed days of school [for the unvaccinated exposed students] and supports in-person education.