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South Carolina Department of Education Face Covering Guidelines for K-12 Public Schools

The CDC suggests that all school reopening plans address adherence to behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19. Face coverings are recommended by national and state public health experts as a simple barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from traveling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the covering coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice. This recommendation is based on what we know about the role respiratory droplets play in the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, paired with emerging evidence (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html#recent-studies>) from clinical and laboratory studies that shows coverings reduce the spray of droplets when worn over the nose and mouth. COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), so the use of coverings is particularly important in settings where people are close to each other or where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

To support the national and state efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to best protect the health and safety of South Carolina public school students and staff, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) is requiring face coverings to be worn on school buses and within public school facilities. The below information outlines the specifics of the state's face covering policy.

A *face covering* is a piece of fabric, cloth, or other material that covers the wearer's nose, mouth, and chin simultaneously and is secured to the wearer's face by elastic, ties, or other means. Acceptable face coverings may be homemade, and they may be reusable or disposable.

School Buses

Students and staff who ride the state's pupil transportation system to and from school are required to wear face coverings while boarding, riding, and exiting school buses. Staff members, including bus drivers, are required to wear face coverings while boarding, riding, driving, and exiting school buses. Bus drivers and support staff should ask any student who boards a bus without a covering to put one on and offer them a disposable or cloth face covering provided by the SCDE.

Students who should **NOT** be required to wear face coverings:

- Those younger than two years old;
- Those who have trouble breathing;
- Those unable to remove the covering without assistance; and/or
- Those with special healthcare or educational needs as determined by an Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 Accommodations Plan, or an individual student healthcare plan, or by a medical doctor

Staff members, including bus drivers, who have trouble breathing and/or those with special healthcare needs as noted by a medical doctor should **NOT** be required to wear face coverings.

School Facilities

Students and staff in South Carolina public schools **must** wear a face covering upon entering a school building, moving through hallways, during carpool/bus drop off or pickup, and when social distancing is not possible or optimal. Student face coverings may be removed upon teacher or administrator direction while in the classroom or during special activities outside the classroom.

Students who should **NOT** be required to wear face coverings:

- Those younger than two years old;
- Those who have trouble breathing;
- Those unable to remove the covering without assistance; and/or
- Those with special healthcare or educational needs as determined by an Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 Accommodations Plan, or an individual student healthcare plan, or by a medical doctor

Staff members, including bus drivers, who have trouble breathing and/or those with special healthcare needs as noted by a medical doctor should **NOT** be required to wear face coverings.

Additional Considerations

The SCDE recognizes that face coverings may be challenging for some students, teachers, and staff, including:

- Younger students, such as those in early elementary school (Pre-Kindergarten-2)
- Students, teachers, and staff with severe asthma or other breathing difficulties.
- Students, teachers, and staff with special educational or healthcare needs, including intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, and sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

In these instances, parents, guardians, caregivers, teachers, and school administrators should consider adaptations and alternatives (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html#feasibility-adaptations>) whenever possible.

Consider use of clear face coverings that cover the nose and wrap securely around the face by some teachers and staff. Clear face coverings should be determined not to cause any breathing difficulties or over heating for the wearer. Teachers and staff who may consider using clear face coverings include:

- Those who interact with students or staff who are deaf or hard of hearing, per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (<https://sites.ed.gov/idea>)
- Teachers of young students learning to read
- Teachers of English learners
- Teachers of students with disabilities, as applicable

Clear face coverings are not face shields. While the CDC does **NOT** recommend use of face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for cloth face coverings because of a lack of evidence of their effectiveness for source control, there are several scenarios in which their use is permitted:

- Face shields may be used to supplement cloth face coverings in those who desire further protection.
- If clear face coverings are not able to be obtained, face shields may be used in place of cloth face coverings in the examples above.
- If a teacher is maintaining greater than six feet of distance between themselves and anyone else while in a fixed location (e.g., their desk or the front of the room), a face shield alone may be used, but the teacher should have a cloth face covering within arm's reach to be able to put on quickly if necessary.

Contact Information

1429 Senate Street

Columbia, SC 29201

Phone: 803-734-8500

Email: info@ed.sc.gov (<mailto:info@ed.sc.gov>)

[Agency Staff Directory \(/contact/staff-directory/\)](/contact/staff-directory/)

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