

FAQ – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

What PPE is required to work in or attend school?

All persons on school grounds including students, teachers, school nurses, administrative and secretarial staff, food service personnel, custodial staff, public safety personnel, etc., must wear a face covering at all times when in school or in transit to and from school via group conveyance (i.e., school buses), unless a specific exemption applies.

What is the primary purpose of a face covering?

The primary purpose of a face covering is to prevent the wearer from potentially exposing or infecting others. To be effective, face coverings must be worn properly and must completely cover both the nose and mouth.

How should cloth face coverings be cleaned and stored?

Personal [cloth face coverings](#) should be taken home, [laundered](#) daily, dried in a dryer, and reused. Personal cloth face coverings should be stored between uses in a clean sealable paper bag or breathable container.

When should a face covering be changed?

Face coverings must be changed immediately if soiled, wet, or torn.

Can face coverings be removed at certain times?

Yes – face coverings may be temporarily removed at school:

- When eating
- When outdoors and physical distancing of at least 6 feet can be maintained
- When playing a musical instrument outdoors with at least 6 feet social distancing
- If using a face shield when other methods of protection are not available or appropriate (<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/IDPH-Update-Appropriate-Use-Face-Shields.pdf>)

Strict adherence to social distancing should be maintained when face coverings are removed in limited situations.

What if a student or staff member is unable to tolerate wearing a face covering?

Individuals who have a condition or medical contraindication (e.g., difficulty breathing) that prevents them from wearing a face covering are required to provide documentation from the individual's physician. These persons may wear a face shield in lieu of a face covering; however social distancing must be strictly enforced. Measures to reduce risk of exposure for these persons should be implemented where possible.

Can a face shield be worn instead of a face covering?

Because respiratory droplets may be expelled from the sides and bottom of face shields, they do not provide adequate 'source control' and should only be used as a substitute for face coverings in the following limited circumstances:

- Individuals who are under the age of 2

- Individuals who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance
- Students who provide a physician's note as documentation that they have a medical contraindication (a contraindication or condition that makes masking absolutely inadvisable) to wearing a face covering
- Teachers needing to show facial expressions where it is important for students to see how a teacher pronounces words (e.g., English learners, early childhood, foreign language, etc.). However, teachers will be required to resume wearing face coverings as soon as possible. Preferred alternatives to teachers wearing face shields include clear face coverings or video instruction. There must be strict adherence to social distancing when a face shield is utilized.

Who has the credentials to be able to provide a medical note or perform a routine health check-up?

IDPH recommends that a physician licensed to practice medicine in all branches of medicine, as defined in [105 ILCS 5/27-8.1](#), be referred to for providing medical notes and performing routine health check-ups.

Can athletic face coverings, e.g., neck warmers be used as a substitute for cloth face coverings?

CDC recommends that people wear [cloth face coverings](#) in public settings and when around people who don't live in your household, especially when other [social distancing](#) measures are difficult to maintain. Cloth face coverings are recommended as a simple barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from traveling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the cloth face covering coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice. This is called [source control](#). It is not known if athletic face coverings/neck warmers provide any benefit as source control to protect others from the spray of respiratory particles. CDC does not recommend use of athletic [face coverings/neck warmers](#) as a substitute for cloth face coverings.