



News Release

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DOH updates school guidance as mask mandate lifts starting March 12

OLYMPIA – The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has released [new guidance for schools, child care, day camps, and other youth activities](#), with changes to masking rules effective March 12. This guidance is being announced in coordination with the end of Washington’s masking requirement, as part of the state’s continued COVID-19 recovery efforts.

Few requirements for schools remain as requirements for indoor mask wearing lift and in recognition that we are a different phase of the pandemic. The new guidance outlines a shorter set of requirements and continues to provide schools and child care providers with options they may utilize to prevent or mitigate transmission of COVID-19. The [full guidance](#) is available now with some additional supporting documents updating Friday, March 11.

“In-person education and care are valuable to social and emotional health,” said Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health. “This new guidance focuses on ways to meet critical state public health requirements while also focusing on keeping kids in school and child care.”

Key areas of focus include:

- Layering optional prevention measures such as masks, screening tests, and ventilation that schools, child cares, or local health can implement generally, for higher risk activities, or in response to outbreaks or when disease levels are high.
- Encouraging COVID-19 prevention strategies through vaccination, ventilation, distancing, screening testing, and masking for personal protection.

Some requirements remain:

- Schools and child care providers must continue to report COVID-19 cases and outbreaks to public health and cooperate with investigations in accordance with [WAC 246-101-420](#).

- Symptomatic individuals must isolate and can return to school or care following the options within the guidance.
- People with COVID-19 must isolate for at least five days and should wear a well-fitting mask or receive a negative test if they return between days 6 - 10. People who do not wear a mask or receive a negative test can return after day 10.
- Schools must provide access to timely diagnostic testing for symptomatic students and staff and those who learn they may have been exposed.
- Schools and child care providers must notify employees and children at risk for severe disease of potential COVID-19 exposures and keep their school or program community informed about cases and outbreaks.
- Schools, districts, child care facilities, and local public health jurisdictions may implement more protective requirements at any time or in response to an outbreak or local surge of disease. More protective guidance must be followed.

The new guidance combines the following previous guidance documents into one document:

- K-12 Schools Requirement for 2021-2022
- K-12 Supplemental Considerations
- Child Care, Day Camps, and Youth Development

DOH is working closely with education and provider partners and local health jurisdictions on understanding and implementing the new recommendations and requirements. Guidance can be found on the [DOH website](#). Those with additional questions can call the state's COVID hotline at 1-800-525-0127, then press #.

The [DOH website](#) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. [Find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#). Sign up for the DOH blog, [Public Health Connection](#).

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