

NEWS RELEASE

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ODE Introduces New Face Covering Requirement

The updated 2020-21 school year guidance includes a new requirement that all students in grades kindergarten and above, as well as all staff, wear face coverings.

(Salem, Ore.) - As part of its planned guidance review process, the Oregon Department of Education released updates today to [Ready Schools, Safe Learners](#), the 2020-21 school year guidance.

Ready Schools, Safe Learners, developed under the direction of Governor Brown and in collaboration with Oregon Health Authority, provides a framework for schools for the 2020-21 school year that prioritizes the health and safety of all students and staff and the families they return to each day.

New Face Covering Requirement

The updated guidance includes a new requirement that face coverings are now required for all students in grades kindergarten and up and all staff in K-12. Earlier versions of the guidance recommended, but did not require, face coverings for students in 6th-12th grade. Earlier guidance versions did not require staff to wear face coverings in all circumstances. The new requirement is in response to mounting evidence that face coverings are effective in mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

To help school districts meet this new requirement, ODE is distributing five million face coverings to school districts, for use by students and staff. The five million face coverings, donated by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and officially called KN95 Face Masks, will be distributed to Education Service Districts and then to school districts over the next few weeks. ODE defines these products as face coverings and not masks, as they are not considered medical-grade masks.

Beginning School

Based on local conditions and readiness, each school (including private schools) will select one of the following ways to begin school in the fall:

- Return to a school campus (*On-Site* learning)
- Return to school with a blend of on-site and comprehensive distance learning (*Hybrid* learning), or
- Return to school through *Comprehensive Distance Learning* (Off-Site learning).



Having face coverings alone do not fully prepare a school to return to in-person instruction. The supply of face coverings complements schools' ongoing efforts to keep students and staff safe and healthy and is one of many factors in any school's individual plan to return to in-person instruction as all schools have to meet a host of safety criteria before returning students to in-person instruction.

"This is a team effort. We're thankful to FEMA, the Oregon Emergency Coordination Center (ECC), the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), the Salem-Keizer School District, and each of our 19 education service districts (ESDs) for their substantial support in acquiring, storing and distributing these face coverings. This effort will boost school districts' efforts to keep their students and staff healthy and safe. This will help ensure that access to face coverings will not become a barrier to meeting the new requirement," said ODE Director Colt Gill.

Oregon is continuing to align face covering guidance across all sectors and to regularly update the guidance to match current conditions. Additional face covering updates may be made prior to the start of the 2020-21 school year.

Other updates to the Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance include:

- Clarified the roles of local public health authorities, school districts and state leaders in determining when school facilities need to close due to an outbreak of COVID-19. (Page 10)
- Increased clarity on how cohorting can limit the risk of spread of COVID-19. (Page 21)

How School Districts Decide On In-Person Instruction

The next regular update to the guidance is expected on August 11. However, ODE and OHA are currently collaborating on a set of guideposts, protocols and public health indicators that will help local schools and districts determine when to open to in-person instruction. Data about readiness of local healthcare systems and the state of local COVID-19 rates will help inform school decisions about when to move to On-Site or Hybrid models of instruction. We expect to release this information and expanded information on how to respond to outbreaks in schools prior to the August 11 release.

The Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance places tremendous responsibility in the hands of local school and health officials with state oversight to protect the health of all Oregonians. Each version of guidance has been written specifically for those who are actively planning and implementing how learning will be supported in the coming school year—school leaders, superintendents, principals, business managers, with specific attention to teacher leaders and support staff.

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