

Return to School FAQ: Fall 2021

Masks

Q. Will my student need to wear a mask?

- A. All students must wear masks indoors unless they have a medical exemption provided by a medical professional. This is required by the [California Department of Public Health](#) (and recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and Centers for Disease Control.) All schools must follow this CDPH direction. Students are not required to wear masks outdoors.

Q. Why are masks required for students, even if they are vaccinated?

- A. The state's priority is to return all students to full-time, in-person learning this fall while keeping the community safe from the spread of COVID-19 variants that can affect both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. For this reason, they are requiring masks at the beginning of this school year. They plan to reassess this requirement by no later than Nov. 1, 2021. Learn more at <https://schools.covid19.ca.gov>.

Q. Do teachers and school staff have to wear masks?

- A. While they are indoors and around students, yes. When staff are in indoor areas that are away from students, such as an office, they may remove their masks if they are fully vaccinated. [Learn more](#).

Q. Who sets the rules about masks in schools?

- A. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) sets the COVID-19 health rules that all schools must follow. County health departments can create stricter rules, not more lenient rules, than the CDPH.

Q. What should I do if my student cannot wear a mask?

- A. If your student is unable to wear a mask and qualifies for an [exemption](#), they must wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it. If your student is unable to wear such an alternative as well and receives special education services, talk to your student's teacher or a school administrator about what other options are available. Schools are required to provide independent study options to students who are unwilling or unable to wear a mask. Contact your school site to learn more about these options.

Safety Measures

Q. What safety measures will be in place to protect my student?

- A. Schools will be following many of the same safety measures that were in place last year, including:
- Handwashing
 - Enhanced cleaning practices
 - Increased air ventilation

- More time spent outside
- COVID-19 health screenings
- Testing and contact tracing

Q. How safe is it for students to return to in-person learning when COVID-19 is still in our community?

- A. The [Centers for Disease Control](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), and [California Department of Public Health](#) agree that it is safe for students to return to school for in-person learning when the right safety measures, like masks, are in place. They all support in-person learning as the best and safest place for most students to learn and engage with their peers.

Vaccination

Q. Is the COVID-19 vaccine required for students age 12+?

- A. Currently, the COVID-19 is under Emergency Use Authorization. Until it has full FDA approval, it cannot be required by schools. At the time that it is approved, schools will likely look to the state for direction on whether or not they can or should require the vaccine.

Q. What are the benefits of vaccination?

- A. In addition to protecting against serious illness, hospitalization, and death, vaccinations provide [many benefits to students](#). Learn more from the [California Department of Public Health](#).

Q. How can I get my student vaccinated?

- A. Vaccines are free and readily available to all youth age 12+. In general, vaccination does not require ID or proof of citizenship. To learn more and find a vaccine clinic near you, visit scoe.org/vaccines or socoemergency.org/vaccine.

Quarantine

Q. What happens if my child is exposed to COVID-19?

- A. The CDPH provides very specific directions for what should happen if a child is exposed to COVID-19. These directions are different from those provided last school year and are meant to help students stay in the classroom with fewer disruptions:
1. **Quarantine recommendations for vaccinated close contacts**
 - a. For those who are vaccinated, follow the [CDPH Fully Vaccinated People Guidance](#) regarding quarantine.
 2. **Quarantine recommendations for unvaccinated students for exposures when both parties were wearing a mask, as required in K-12 indoor settings. These are adapted from the [CDC K-12 guidance](#) and [CDC definition of a close contact](#).**
 - a. When both parties were wearing a mask in the indoor classroom setting,

unvaccinated students who are close contacts (more than 15 minutes over a 24-hour period within 0-6 feet indoors) may undergo a modified 10-day quarantine as follows. They may continue to attend school for in-person instruction if they:

- i. Are asymptomatic;
 - ii. Continue to appropriately mask, as required;
 - iii. Undergo at least twice weekly testing during the 10-day quarantine; and
 - iv. Continue to quarantine for all extracurricular activities at school, including sports, and activities within the community setting.
3. **Quarantine recommendations for: unvaccinated close contacts who were not wearing masks or for whom the infected individual was not wearing a mask during the indoor exposure; or unvaccinated students as described above.**
- a. For these contacts, those who remain asymptomatic, meaning they have NOT had any symptoms, may discontinue self-quarantine under the following conditions:
 - i. Quarantine can end after Day 10 from the date of last exposure without testing; OR
 - ii. Quarantine can end after Day 7 if a diagnostic specimen is collected after Day 5 from the date of last exposure and tests negative.
 - b. To discontinue quarantine before 14 days following last known exposure, asymptomatic close contacts must:
 - i. Continue daily self-monitoring for symptoms through Day 14 from last known exposure; AND
 - ii. Follow all recommended non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., wearing a mask when around others, hand washing, avoiding crowds) through Day 14 from last known exposure.
 - c. If any symptoms develop during this 14-day period, the exposed person must immediately isolate, get tested and contact their healthcare provider with any questions regarding their care.

Symptoms:

Q. What should I do if my child shows symptoms of COVID-19?

- A. If your child shows symptoms of COVID-19, please keep your child home from school and contact your medical provider. Your child should stay home for:
 - At least 24 hours have passed since resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications; and
 - Other symptoms have improved; and
 - At least one of the following has occurred:
 - i. They have a negative COVID-19 test

- ii. A healthcare provider's note that the symptoms are typical of an underlying chronic condition like allergies or asthma
- iii. A healthcare provider has diagnosed a different condition
- iv. At least 10 days have passed since symptom onset.

Preparing for the First Day of School?

Q. What special things will my child need for the first day of school during COVID-19?

- A. Your child should come wearing a face covering. You may wish to send them with a backup face covering as well. For more information on recommended face coverings, please visit: [. Your school may also ask that your child bring a refillable water bottle.](#)

Q. How can I reassure my young child about starting school?

- A. Consider taking your child to visit the school site. School grounds are open to the public during non-school hours. Touring the grounds can help your child feel more familiar and comfortable with the campus. As school approaches, work with your child's teacher to help them understand what the school day will look like, what they can expect from pickup and dropoff, and more.