

Peters Township School District

Why is the District Mandating Masks at this Time?

The Peters Township School District approved an updated Health & Safety Plan on August 16, 2021 that includes a temporary indoor mask requirement for students, staff and visitors. This change from the Health & Safety Plan, previously adopted on June 28, was driven notably by recent updates to close contact quarantine requirements issued by the PA Departments of Health and Education.

Under current quarantine requirements, universal indoor masking provides the best possible chance for our classrooms and schools to remain open and to avoid disruptions to learning and other school-related activities due to quarantine. If all students are properly masked and seated at least three feet apart, quarantining of asymptomatic students is nearly eliminated. Last year under the former quarantine guidelines, we were required to quarantine 1,833 students resulting in a loss of over 12,830 student learning days.

What necessitated the change in the District's Health & Safety Plan?

Due to the rise in cases of COVID-19 locally and nationally, the following key events/announcements occurred:

- August 5 - CDC updates mitigation recommendations to include universal indoor masking regardless of vaccination status
- August 13 – Districts received notice that the PA Departments of Health and Education will follow CDC guidance related to Close Contacts and quarantine as outlined in the PA Health Department School Epidemiology Team's Harm Reduction Framework for K-12 Schools.

As such, the Board determined that due to the new close contact quarantine requirements, a temporary universal masking requirement is the best path to reduce lost learning days due to quarantine.

What impact does quarantining have on students/families?

During the 2020-21 school year, there were 1833 close contact quarantines in the District. The quarantines resulted in over 12,830 lost days of in-person learning. Limiting disruptions due to quarantine promotes the following:

- Academic: Consistent attendance for in-person learning
- Activities: Ability to participate in extracurricular activities and athletics
- Social-Emotional: Connection to peers and caring adults
- Family: More predictable childcare and work schedules

Who is considered a close contact relative to schools?

The CDC and the PA DOH have determined that in the K-12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition includes students who were within 6 feet of an infected person for 15 consecutive minutes or more. A new and important exception is that students seated at least 3 feet apart are not considered close contacts if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) were correctly and consistently wearing masks.

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For staff members and other adults, a close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for 15 consecutive minutes or more.

What are the PA DOH's quarantine requirements?

Individuals who are identified as close contacts must quarantine for at least 10 days from the date of last exposure. The PA DOH permits a shortened quarantine period (7 days) for asymptomatic individuals with a negative test result at least five days from the date of last exposure.

Individuals with full vaccination, recent COVID infection, or recent proof of antibodies do NOT need to quarantine if asymptomatic.

What are the guidelines for fully-vaccinated individuals and those with recent COVID infection or proof of antibodies?

Individuals with full vaccination, recent COVID infection, or recent proof of antibodies do NOT need to quarantine if asymptomatic. However, these individuals will be notified of possible exposure. Should symptoms develop, individuals must stay home and seek testing.

What is the authority of the PA DOH as it applies to schools?

PA DOH has Authority to Enact Policy: The PA DOH has the authority and is required by regulation to ensure isolation of a person with a communicable disease or infection and any other disease control measure it considers to be appropriate to protect the public. 28 Pa.Code § 27.60.

PA DOH has Authority to Require Quarantines & School Closures: The PA DOH has the authority to decide if close contact quarantines are necessary and to determine which contacts shall be quarantined, which could include the quarantine of entire classes or school buildings. 28 Pa.Code § 27.65.

PA DOH has Authority to Pursue Criminal Penalties: School Officials that interfere with case investigation or fail to follow directives for contact tracing or student/staff quarantine may be subject to professional discipline and/or criminal penalties. 28 Pa.Code §§ 27.6 and 27.8.

Are there exemptions to the indoor mask requirement?

If you believe that your child cannot safely wear a mask because of a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)/Section 504, please reach out to your school principal to begin the evaluation and/or plan revision process. Contact information for our principals may be found on the District website.

Compliance with District health and safety protocols is a requirement as published in all District handbooks and the Student Code of Conduct distributed to families annually. Consequences may include exclusion from school, inability to participate in extracurricular activities, etc.