

BACK-TO-SCHOOL MASK UPDATE

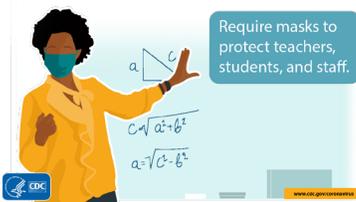
In response to the latest guidance for K-12 schools issued July 27, 2021, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Gwinnett County Public Schools has updated its back-to-school plans to require masks. **Masks are required for students, staff, and visitors to all Gwinnett County Public Schools' facilities and on school buses, regardless of vaccination status.** This decision takes into account current conditions, the rise in COVID-19 case rates in Gwinnett County, and the ineligibility of children age 12 and younger for the vaccine.



So, what does the mask requirement mean for GCPS students, staff, and visitors to our schools?

- 1. Masks are required in all GCPS facilities and on GCPS school buses.** Masks that have an exhalation valve or vent and masks made from mesh fabrics are not recommended by the CDC as they allow virus particles to escape and spread. As a result, these types of masks do not meet GCPS' mask requirement.
- 2. While masks are required, mask breaks will occur...**
 - During meals;
 - During outdoor activities, including teacher-directed PE (also called recess);
 - When doing physical activity like cardio exercises, etc., in PE, or athletic practice or competition;
 - During band when playing instruments; and
 - In class when a student or teacher needs a "mini" break. (They may remove their mask and put it back on after a few minutes.)
- 3. There are situations when accommodations to our mask requirement may be provided...** We understand that some of our students with disabilities are unable to wear a mask for extended periods and accommodations will be made for these students. In addition, students and employees who have medical conditions that make wearing a mask difficult and who provide medical documentation from a doctor may go without a mask during part of the day. However, these individuals still will need to wear masks or face coverings during certain part of the day (on the bus, in hallways, in common areas, etc.). In addition, students participating in athletic practices and events are not required to wear a mask. GCPS strongly encourages mask use by visitors attending outdoor events/activities. Visitors/spectators for indoor events will need to wear a mask.

Gwinnett County Public Schools is using the most recent CDC guidance and information about transmission and case rates within our community as part of its decision-making process regarding mitigation efforts. The district will continue to monitor current conditions and updates to guidance, using this information to make changes to its mask requirement and other mitigation strategies during the 2021–22 school year as needed.



Require masks to protect teachers, students, and staff.

The latest CDC guidance on masks and face coverings...

- The CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K–12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Wearing a mask helps protect against transmission of COVID.
- Children should return to full-time, in-person learning in the fall with layered prevention strategies in place, including the wearing of masks by all in schools.
- The CDC redefined quarantine recommendations for students, indicating that close contacts do not have to be quarantined if both the close contact and ill student are masked appropriately.
- All passengers and drivers on school buses are required to wear a mask.
- While masks help protect against transmission of COVID-19 and its variants, the CDC indicates vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the pandemic.

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Current 9/14/21



Timeline of Recent Changes to Mask Guidance, Executive Orders, and Public Health Information

- March 31, 2021 Governor Kemp issues an Executive Order, renewing the Public Health State of Emergency last renewed on Feb. 26, 2021, in response to COVID-19. The order states, “From April 8, 2021, at 12 a.m. until April 30, 2021, at 11:59 p.m. shall practice social distancing and are encouraged to wear masks in public and practice sanitation, but not required to do so.”
- April 30, 2021 Governor Kemp issues an Executive Order, effective May 1, 2021, through May 30, 2021.
- May 13, 2021 The CDC released guidance on the ability of fully vaccinated people to resume pre-pandemic activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and work place guidance. This guidance raised questions for schools about how to proceed in the current school year.
- May 15, 2021 The CDC recommended schools continue to use the COVID-19 prevention strategies outlined in the current version of CDC’s Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools for at least the remainder of the 2020–2021 academic school year. It indicated it would update its guidance for schools in the coming weeks.
- May 20, 2021 Gwinnett County Commission Chair Nicole Love Hendrickson rescinded the Local Emergency Order requiring face masks or face coverings when entering or utilizing county-owned or -leased facilities.
- May 25, 2021 Gov. Kemp issues Executive Order saying that no information from GRITS (Georgia Registry of Immunization Transactions and Services) or any other COVID vaccination information held by the state can be used for determining the COVID vaccination status of any individual for the purpose of allowing or prohibiting such individual access to services, property, employment or other rights privileges based on such status. This includes K-12 schools.
- May 26, 2021 Gwinnett County Health Department reported the county has a positivity rate of 2.9% and a 2.6% case rate, both of which are in the lowest ranges. The Health Department has indicated that the current CDC guidance stands for schools but that they expect changes and will continue to monitor for new guidance and provide it to partners to inform decision-making.