



ENTIAT SCHOOL DISTRICT 127

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Dear Entiat Staff and Community,

The State Department of Health (DOH) released updated guidance for schools to align with the statewide mask order lifting after this Friday, March 11. In developing the updated guidance, DOH worked hard to balance the priorities of sustaining in-person learning while preserving student and staff health and safety.

As the Governor announced a few weeks ago, beginning Saturday, March 12, masks will not be required in the school environment – it will instead be each employee and student's choice whether to continue masking after the requirement lifts.

Some of the key changes in the updated guidance include:

- Masks will still be required in nurse/health rooms and isolation rooms, as these are considered healthcare settings.
- Screening testing for COVID-19 for higher risk activities will be optional.
- Students and staff who test positive for COVID-19 are required to:
 - Isolate for at least 5 days. They may return to school after 5 days if their symptoms have improved.
 - After their 5-day isolation, on days 6–10 after a positive test, students and staff will be required to wear a well-fitted mask or a face shield with a drape or test negative with an antigen or at-home test.

As we move forward, we will continue to:

- Notify our local health department of cases of COVID-19.
- Notify individuals and groups of potential exposures.
- Provide student and staff access to testing for COVID-19.

As a reminder, all students and staff are required to continue wearing masks indoors until March 12. If you are interested, the new guidance – which goes into effect March 12 – can be found [on DOH's website](#).

Sincerely,

Miles Caples
Superintendent

Talking Points & FAQs:

Lifting the Statewide School Mask Requirement

Background

- Over the past two years, students, educators, school employees, and their families have remained flexible and adapted to changing health and safety guidance as public health experts continued to learn more about COVID-19.
- Across the state, school districts have prepared for changes to our mitigation strategy over the past two years with:
 - A COVID-19 vaccination requirement for all school employees,
 - Vaccinations for individuals ages 5+ widely available,
 - One of the most robust school COVID-19 testing systems in the country,
 - Improved ventilation systems, and
 - A well-researched understanding of self-mitigation protocols.

Mask Requirements Moving Forward

- **Beginning March 21**, face masks will no longer be required in most settings, including K–12 schools and childcare facilities.
- Masks will still be required in school buses, per federal law. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is set to revisit the requirement mid-March.
- Until March 21, face masks will continue to be required for all students, staff, and visitors in all school buildings.
- Public health modeling indicates that cases and hospitalizations from COVID-19 will continue decreasing over the coming weeks, and by mid-March, they are expected to drop to rates similar to last summer.
- The decision to remove the statewide mask requirement was based on the best science and research available, as well as our experience and preparation to continue combatting this virus.
- A local school district could decide to implement a mask mandate for their students and staff on their own, though we would strongly encourage them to make such a decision in partnership with their local health jurisdiction. Locally elected school board members, who set policies for their districts, are not health experts and should not be making health decisions on their own.

Respecting Others' Choices

- Barring a local requirement, students and staff will have the choice to wear a mask at school, with the expectation that others' choices will be respected.
- One should not make assumptions regarding someone's beliefs or health status, nor should they comment on them.
- District will not tolerate bullying of any kind.
- Educators will discuss the change with students in a developmentally appropriate manner, including how to respect others' personal choice.

Health and Safety Protocol Updates

Barring a local requirement for masks, students and staff will continue to have the option to wear masks at school, with the expectation that those decisions will be respected. Those decisions should not be used to make assumptions about their personal beliefs or their health status and should not be commented on. Districts should not tolerate bullying of any kind of students who continue wearing masks.

What is being done to protect students and staff who are at greater risk of COVID-19?

Public health experts continue to recommend full vaccination and masking for those who are at greater risk for serious COVID-related health issues. The most important mitigation strategy is to continue increasing the number of students and school employees who are fully vaccinated.

Why will masks still be required on school buses?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently requires all individuals on public transportation, including school buses, wear masks. Neither the state nor local school districts are able to change this requirement.

What would cause a local health officer to start requiring masks in schools again?

Local health officers have always had the authority in state law to require health and safety mitigation measures in schools when the situation warrants it, and that will not change. Health officers will continue to monitor community case counts and hospitalizations, and they may add new mitigation measures for schools if they deem it necessary.

What happens if a school district stops requiring masks before March 21?

School districts are required to follow the law, and the law currently requires masks in schools. If school districts willfully violate state law, they face legal and financial risks.