

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Announces Indoor Mask Requirement for Beginning of 2021-2022 School Year

08/6/2021

**EAST BRUNSWICK** – Joined by educators, medical professionals, parents, and school administrators, Governor Phil Murphy today announced that all students, educators, staff, and visitors will be required to wear face masks indoors for the start of the 2021-2022 school year. The Governor signed Executive Order (EO) 251, which will mandate masking in the indoor premises of all public, private, and parochial preschool, elementary, and secondary school buildings, with limited exceptions. The EO is effective on Monday, August 9, 2021.

In recent weeks, both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and American Academy of Pediatrics have called for students to wear masks due to the increasing prevalence of the Delta COVID-19 variant, the ineligibility of those under 12 for vaccination, and a rise in pediatric COVID-19 cases.

“We understand that students learn best in a classroom setting and remain committed to having our schools open for full-time, in-person instruction this fall,” **said Governor Murphy**. “While this announcement gives us no pleasure, I know that by taking this precaution we can keep our schools open while also keeping our children safe. We will continue to closely monitor the science and data and will lift this mandate when we can do so safely. I urge those who are eligible for vaccination but have yet to be vaccinated to act and help move our state in the right direction.”

While masks will be broadly required in school buildings for the coming school year, exceptions will remain unchanged from the 2020-2021 school year, and include:

- When doing so would inhibit the individual’s health, such as when the individual is exposed to extreme heat indoors;
- When the individual has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance;
- When a student’s documented medical condition or disability, as reflected in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Educational Plan pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, precludes use of a face covering;
- When the individual is under two (2) years of age;
- When an individual is engaged in an activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask, such as eating and drinking or playing an instrument that would be obstructed by the face covering;
- When the individual is engaged in high-intensity aerobic or anerobic activity;
- When a student is participating in high-intensity physical activities during a physical education class in a well-ventilated location and able to maintain a physical distance of six feet from all other individuals; or
- When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task.

“Given the Delta variant’s high transmissibility and the fact that the COVID-19 vaccine is not yet available for children under 12, we must use all the prevention strategies we have to protect children in classrooms this fall,” **said Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli**. “Children should wear masks, physically distance, wash their hands frequently, stay home when they’re sick, get tested when they have symptoms and get vaccinated as soon as they are eligible.”

“Throughout the pandemic, our goal has always been the safe return to in-person learning, where children thrive

academically and socially,” **said Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner of Education.** “Today’s announcement achieves that goal – while also following the direction from our state’s and nation’s health specialists to ensure the safety of educators and students along with their families.”

“Here in New Jersey we have seen a concerning rise in viral spread,” **said Dr. Jeanne Craft, President of the New Jersey Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.** “A hopeful spring has become a worrisome summer. The conditions have changed, the risk is higher, especially for children. We need to move forward with an abundance of caution. We have come so far, but we need to continue to rely on scientific evidence and expert advice to keep children, teachers, school staff and communities as safe as possible.”

“Today, as school leaders, we can breathe a collective sigh of relief as school districts can now put the increasingly divisive debate about masking in schools in the rearview mirror,” **said Dr. Janet Fike, Superintendent of Schools at the Morris-Union Jointure Commission and President of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators.** “Thank you, Governor Murphy and countless medical and health professionals, for recognizing that medical science must govern the masking debate.”

“The New Jersey State School Nurses Association (NJSSNA) supports universal masking in schools,” **said Donna Pleus, President of the New Jersey State School Nurses Association.** “We must implement the safest public health mitigation strategies that have proven protective for our New Jersey school children and staff.”

“We cannot waver in our commitment to protecting the health and safety of students and staff as the pandemic is surging,” **said Marie Blistan, President of the New Jersey Education Association.** “Above all, we remain committed to providing our students with the best possible educational experience this year. They deserve it and we are determined to make sure they have it.”

“This guidance is in line with the recommendations of the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics,” **said Dr. Lawrence S. Feinsod, Executive Director of the New Jersey Schools Boards Association.** “Against the backdrop of the rapid spread of the Delta variant, masks will play an important role in making possible what should be our top priority: safely returning children and staff to the classroom.”

“New Jersey PTA supports following the latest and most up to date guidance from the CDC and acknowledges Governor Murphy’s difficult decision,” **said Candy Fredericks, President of the New Jersey Parent Teacher Association (PTA).** It is the goal of New Jersey PTA to ensure that each and every student in New Jersey is able to have a safe, happy, and equitable learning environment as we begin school in September and way past the pandemic.”

“This necessary, incremental step, aligned with guidance already provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention along with the American Academy of Pediatrics will help ensure our East Brunswick School community’s safety during periods of spiked variant transmissibility and until vaccinations are available to all our students,” **said Dr. Victor Valeski, Superintendent of East Brunswick Public Schools.**

Copy of Executive Order #251 (<https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-251.pdf>)

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