

Considerations in Using Facial Coverings When Supporting Students during In-Person Instruction

(Revised 11/12/21)

As the global severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS CoV2) or COVID-19 pandemic continues, preparation is required to ensure staff and students' safe return to school. Safety must be a priority and decisions regarding facial coverings for students and staff must be in alignment with respective county health departments and state orders. Decisions about supports that may be needed for individual students with IEPs to meet their disability-related needs must be made through an IEP team meeting or by using [Form I-10](#) with parent agreement (*Notice of Changes to IEP without an IEP Team Meeting*).

In addition to precautions outlined in *COVID-19 Infection Control and Mitigation Measures for Wisconsin Schools 2021-2022* the following are considerations for selecting the type of facial covering when working with any student with a health plan, a 504 plan or an individualized education program (IEP). These considerations may be appropriate for any student, with or without an IEP, to support learning and improve their ability to access instruction and educational environments.

The use of any facial covering may negatively impact the ability for a student to see their teachers' and peers' faces and easily hear their voices. Speakers use not only their voice but a wide variety of facial expressions to communicate with others. The wearing of a facial covering can muffle the speaker's voice and reduce intelligibility, especially when there is background noise. Students may rely on auditory directions and descriptions to access their learning environment or may rely visually on speech reading to fill in gaps in understanding due to distance and background noise. It should be noted that there is no evidence that the use of face masks prevents or delays speech and language development (American Speech-Language Hearing Association, 2021).

Adults wearing facial coverings

The following recommendations were adapted from the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) to enable educators' ability to increase successful communication while wearing facial coverings (ASHA 2021).

- Make sure to have the attention of the listener before talking.
- Face the listener directly, and make sure nothing is blocking the view with the listener.

- Speak slowly and slightly louder, but do not shout or exaggerate speech.
- Use eyes, hands, and body language to add information to speech. To optimize hearing, confirm that those who use hearing aids or cochlear implants are wearing their devices or use a hearing assistance technology or assistive technology listening device.
- Provide visual references (e.g., printouts, notes, images) to accompany communication.
- Ask if the listener understood the communication. If they didn't, rephrase the communication or write it down.
- Ask the listener to repeat important information to see whether they understood what is said.
- Reduce competing noise in the environment, if possible.
- When talking with someone new, ask the person what can be done to make communication easier for the listener.

When considering the use of facial coverings for students, the following recommendations were developed based on state and national guidance and recommendations.

For all students with disabilities including those receiving special education services through an IEP

- Consider whether a universal facial covering policy may be necessary if that policy allows students with certain disabilities full participation in the educational programming and environment that they would otherwise be denied.
- Ensure students with disabilities are not stigmatized, bullied, or placed in segregated settings due to medical or disability-related needs that require the use of facial coverings by the student, staff, and peers.
- Monitor federal OCR civil rights investigations and consult with district legal counsel to determine what is required under state and federal law.
- Review the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Order](#) issued on January 29, 2021 that requires all persons on school buses wear masks.
- Engage families in discussions of any accommodations that may be required through the student's IEP or 504 plan to ensure the student is able to access, engage, and make progress in their age or grade level general education curriculum, instruction, environment, and activities. This discussion should include special considerations for students with complex medical needs.

For students requiring explicit instruction:

- Utilize video modeling, social narratives, visual supports (e.g., pictures) paired with explicit instruction to help students know and understand how to use personal protective equipment (PPE), including facial coverings.
- When working with students who require close proximity in order to engage and participate in lessons, consider the use of a full face shield or protective eye-wear and a smock in addition to a facial covering with clear plastic.

For students with sensory needs:

- Consider options or alternatives for facial coverings, such as buttons that allow for putting the facial covering straps on a headband or cap, instead of around the ears.
- Consider the use of a face shield.
- Provide explicit instruction on wearing a facial covering or shield along with frequent opportunities for student practice.
- While plexiglass barriers are no longer recommended as an effective mitigation strategy due to current knowledge regarding the aerosolization of viral particles, their use may be considered for students who are unable to tolerate or wear facial coverings yet work closely with staff who are wearing clear facial coverings.
- Provide scheduled facial covering breaks and dedicated facial covering break locations.

For students who need to see people's faces when communicating, consider the following:

- Using a facial covering with clear plastic allows for visual access of the face and mouth when modeling specific mouth or tongue placement in the production of certain sounds. These clear facial coverings may assist students to visualize lip-reading, see facial gestures for clarity and enhanced meaning, as well as view significant grammatical features associated with American Sign Language.
- Pairing facial coverings with personal listening technology (e.g., hearing aids, DM/FM systems, and other types of amplification systems) for students who require enhanced auditory access.
- While plexiglass barriers are no longer recommended as an effective mitigation strategy due to current knowledge regarding the aerosolization of viral particles, their use may be considered for students who are unable to tolerate or wear facial coverings yet work closely with staff who are wearing clear facial coverings. Using plexiglass barriers allow both staff and students to see the face and mouth during

communication work and assist with maintaining voice volume, as well as reduce distortion produced by wearing a facial covering.

- Using visual supports (e.g., shared screen, whiteboard, notepad) when working with students who have communication or complex needs. In some situations, a facial covering may be removed in order to provide access, especially when CDC guidelines of 6 feet of distancing can be maintained.
- Using a [teleservice delivery model](#) (even across the room or within the same building) in the event that a student has goals where the removal of facial coverings for practice and instruction would be beneficial.
- Informing students who wear glasses how to use their facial covering without fogging up their glasses (see [Tips on How to Wear a Mask without Fogging Glasses](#)).

For students who need direct physical prompting or who are tactile learners:

- When using tactile sign language, staff, and when possible, students, should consider wearing gloves. Staff should try to modify signs as best as possible to avoid touching their face or the student's face while using tactile sign language. The staff, and when possible, the student, should both wear facial coverings.
- When using close vision sign language, staff, and when possible, the student, should wear a facial covering. When appropriate, alternative options to support communication can be used such as video calls or the use of a CCTV that attaches to a laptop and can be used to zoom in on the communication partner.
- Keep in mind when setting up the educational environment that students who obtain information tactually often reduce the distance between themselves and the person or object they want to view.
- Consider the use of a full face shield in addition to a facial covering when working with students who require close proximity in order to engage and participate in lessons, especially when students are unable to wear facial coverings themselves.
- Focus on alternatives to physical prompting such as visual schedules, break cards, visual boundaries, or physical devices and supports to help the student transition from one location to another.
- Consider the use of smocks and face shields when working with students needing hand over hand, hand under hand, or other physical assistance and support.
- Utilize technology applications such as Aira and Be My Eyes, or use phone cameras or other devices for magnification, to help maintain social distancing and to navigate public areas.

- Encourage students to advocate for themselves by asking questions and making requests to support their safety and social distancing such as:
 - “I can’t tell if you are wearing a mask. Please put on a mask if you are going to be near me.”
 - “How far away are you?”
 - “Could you please repeat yourself or speak louder? I couldn’t hear you.”
 - “My apologies for coming so close. It’s very difficult to tell how far apart to be, so if you can move farther away, that would be great.”
 - “Please let me know when I can move up in the line.”

For students who need support for behavior:

- Work to re-establish and deepen relationships.
- Provide explicit instruction and modeling for self-regulation skills.
- Co-regulate with students to assist them with early de-escalation. Focus on using proactive and preventative strategies to the greatest extent possible so that the need for physical intervention is minimized.
- Provide scheduled facial covering breaks or provide a break card in which a student can request a break in a designated break location.
- Train staff members who are working with students whose behavior may cause an imminent threat to their physical safety or the safety of others in crisis prevention and intervention.
- Consider the need to conduct a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) to identify the root causes of a student’s behavioral needs.
- Individuals and teams should consider the potential for virus transmission as a potential risk when determining if physical intervention is necessary. There may be times and situations in which the physical, psychological and health risks (including virus transmission) of physical intervention is greater than the risks presented by a student’s behavior.
- If a student acts out physically in a way that presents a clear, present, and imminent threat of their physical safety or the safety of others, physical intervention may be necessary. Use the least restrictive intervention feasible to de-escalate the situation, such as removing other individuals from the area or block and move. If physical restraint, intervention, or close proximity is necessary, staff members should disengage from close proximity as soon as it is safe to do so.

- Teams should be aware of and avoid the potential stereotype threat and stigmatization that may result from students and their peers recognizing a clearly visible change in adult attire and should consider this outcome when using smocks and face shields along with a facial covering when working with students who may become dysregulated.
- Use guidelines currently in place and follow standard protocol Bloodborne Pathogen Training.

General Resources

[Wisconsin DPI COVID-19 Special Education Question and Answer Document](#)

Provides updated information from Wisconsin DPI including information related to development of contingency plans to ensure a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

[COVID-19 Infection Control and Mitigation Measures for Wisconsin Schools](#)

This document provides guidance for keeping students and school staff safe during in-person instruction through precautionary measures and research.

[Priorities for a Safe Return to School for Children with Complex Health Needs](#)

Information from the Restarting Safe Education and Testing (ReSET) team provides resources for Children with Medical Complexity. These resources identify priorities and downloadable resources for families, school staff, and health care providers.

[COVID-19: Considerations for Wearing Masks](#)

This document provides guidance for wearing cloth face coverings from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

[Restarting Safe Education and Testing for Children with Medical Complexity](#)

Information is also available from the Restarting Safe Education and Testing (ReSET) team that provides resources for Children with Medical Complexity. These resources identify priorities and downloadable resources for families, school staff, and health care providers.

[Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System \(WSEMS\)](#)

WSEMS provides mediation and facilitated IEP meetings, at no cost to families and schools.

[Restart & Recovery: Meeting the Assessment Needs of Students with Disabilities During Times of Interrupted Schooling](#)

This report from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) offers recommendations and strategies on how to best meet the assessment needs of students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities and students with the most

significant cognitive disabilities, during times of restart and recovery associated with interrupted education due to extended school closures. The report highlights guiding principles to restart and recovery, data needs, logistical considerations for assessments, collection and evaluation of data, and interpretation and use of data.

[Resources to Assist with Virtual Learning for Students on Alternate Standards](#)

A collection of resources from national organizations to support students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

[Supports for Students with Neurodiverse and Social Emotional Needs](#)

When making virtual learning plans teachers, caregivers, and families can find a variety of resources to consider to help support students with communication needs, visual supports, social emotional needs, academic resources and more using this curated list. This information is meant to provide resources that may be helpful and is not an exhaustive list.

[Autism Internet Modules](#)

A variety of free online modules including how to implement social narratives, visual schedules, visual barriers, naturalistic interventions, computer aided instruction, and many more.

[WI DPI Assistive Technology Web Page](#)

Includes modules, resources, and information to support the use of assistive technology in the classroom based on individual student needs.

[Supporting Neurodiverse Students](#)

A collection of professional learning resources to support needs common to students with autism and emotional behavioral disabilities.

[Return to School Post COVID-19 Closure Considerations for Students with Disabilities and Special Healthcare Needs](#)

“The purpose of this document is to guide school nurses when planning for return to school for students with disabilities and special healthcare needs (D/SHN) as defined by Section 504 or Individual Education Program (IEP) teams.”

[AOTA: Back to School Resources During COVID-19](#)

The American Occupational Therapy Association has many resources for therapists providing services in school-based settings including recommendations for using masks and other facial coverings.

[WI DPI Universal Design for Learning](#)

UDL is a framework for proactively designing learning environments and experiences that enable ALL students to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning needed to be expert, lifelong learners.

[UDL Forward!](#)

UDL Forward! is a new project supporting Wisconsin educators' use of Universal Design for Learning core competencies and technology resources as a means to provide effective remote and in-person learning experiences.

[WI DPI Teleservice Forward Web Page](#)

DPI and CESA 1 have partnered on a project called Teleservice Forward, funded by the CARES Act to provide professional development and technical assistance for Related Service Providers, who provide or will provide teleservices to students.

Additional Resources

Manufacturers of facial coverings and shields with clear visual access:

Badger Shield+ <https://store.midwestproto.com/>

University of Wisconsin-Madison Makerspace's Covid-19 Response
<https://making.engr.wisc.edu/shield/>

The ClearMask <https://www.theclearmask.com/product>

Safe & Clear <https://safenclear.com>

Rapid Response PPE <https://www.rapidresponseppe.com>

FaceView Mask <https://www.faceviewmask.com>

The Hearing Spot <https://www.thehearingspot.com>

TrueHero Face Shields <https://trueheroshield.com>

InstaShield <https://www.instashieldusa.com>

ZShield <https://www.zverse.com/our-products/>

CrossTex Face Shield <https://www.crosstex.com/face-shield-152>

Manufacturers of facial coverings and gaiters for professionals working with active students or who work outdoors:

Pomchies <https://pomchies.com>

SCHAMPA.COM <https://schampa.com>

BOCO Gear – Custom Face Masks <https://www.bocogear.com>

Outdoor Apparel & Face Shields <https://safishing.com>

Additional PPE Purchase Options:

CESA Purchasing <https://cesapurchasing.org/ppe>

Social Narratives

Social Stories from the Autism Society of America:

[How to wear a mask](#)

[Social distancing](#)

[Keeping friends safe](#)

[Going back to work](#)

[Wearing a Mask Social Story](#) from The Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative (ASERT) in Pennsylvania

[Wearing a Face Mask Social Story](#) from Texas Autism Society

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Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. 2020. "PPE Resources for Students Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing." Accessed at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1h4xl_yF2_Cukd7JucF0Y7imHfGZG4Nja6yTP3giONTE/edit