

# Gardner Public Schools

## Face Mask/Face Covering Protocol for staff and students

***IMPORTANT NOTE: While this protocol lifts the masking requirement in most cases, all GPS students and staff must respect the rights of those who choose to wear masks, or not to wear masks, within the policy. The district will not tolerate any shaming, bullying, or teasing of those who make masking choices that comply with this protocol.***

In accordance with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education along with policy EBCFA: Face Coverings, all Gardner Public School staff, students, and visitors may choose to wear masks, or not wear masks, except in the following situations:

- Students and staff must wear masks in nurses offices (DPH requirement);
- Students or staff with any COVID symptoms must wear masks at school; and
- Students or staff coming back from isolation or quarantine after five days, must mask consistently for the following five days.

*For those required to wear masks because they are in one of the above-listed situations,* masks may be removed at the following times:

- ***during mask breaks-*** unmasked individuals should try to maintain six feet of social distancing whenever possible.
- ***while eating and drinking*** -Whenever students or staff are unmasked for any reason, including eating/drinking, they should make every effort to maintain six feet of social distancing.

Following CDC guidance, individuals are excused from wearing masks if the individual:

- cannot remove the mask or face covering without assistance
- is having difficulty breathing
- has a documented medical or behavioral health condition that inhibits them from wearing a mask or face covering. Alternative Personal Protective Equipment should be considered for these individuals, if possible, such as a face shield. Gardner Public Schools may require documentation of conditions to exclude a staff or student from this requirement.

Additionally, DPH and DESE ***recommend*** the following people continue to mask inside:

- unvaccinated individuals
- fully vaccinated individuals that have a weakened immune system, or are at increased risk for severe disease because of age or an underlying medical condition
- individuals that live with someone that has a weakened immune system or is at increased risk for severe disease or is unvaccinated

If students are in violation of this protocol, the building principal and school health director will consult with a parent/guardian to determine whether an exception is appropriate. If the choice does not warrant an exemption, the principal may impose appropriate consequences for continued violations of this protocol.

Violations by staff will be handled in the same manner as other violations to district protocols.