



STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MOLLY M. SPEARMAN
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

TO: District Superintendents
Transportation Directors

FROM: Molly M. Spearman
State Superintendent of Education

DATE: August 26, 2021

RE: Face Coverings on School Buses

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) [announced on July 6, 2021](#), that it would no longer enforce the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention's \(CDC\) January 29, 2021, Order](#) that requires the use of face coverings by people on public transportation conveyances and hubs, which includes school buses. This decision was made at a time when COVID-19 transmission rates and case counts across South Carolina were very low.

Throughout the pandemic, the SCDE has updated its COVID-19 guidance as conditions have changed and as more information has become available. It has become apparent based on COVID-19 data being reported by schools along with increasing levels of the highly transmissible Delta variant in local communities, that more protective measures are needed to lower the risk of virus transmission and keep our schools open and operating as safely as possible.

For this reason, the SCDE will again enforce the CDC's Order requiring the use of face coverings by students and staff on state owned and operated school buses. All districts must be in compliance with this requirement no later than Monday, August 30, 2021. To facilitate adherence to the CDC Order, the SCDE will equip all state-owned school buses with an adequate supply of face coverings that meet CDC Order requirements. If a student boards a bus without a face covering, bus drivers should offer the student a face covering. However, no student should be denied transportation for failing to adhere to the CDC Order.

The following are attributes of masks needed to fulfill the requirements of the CDC Order.

- A properly worn mask completely covers the nose and mouth.
- Cloth masks should be made with two or more layers of a breathable fabric that is tightly woven (i.e., fabrics that do not let light pass through when held up to a light source).
- Mask should be secured to the head with ties, ear loops, or elastic bands that go behind the head. If gaiters are worn, they should have two layers of fabric or be folded to make two layers.
- Mask should fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face.
- Mask should be a solid piece of material without slits, exhalation valves, or punctures.

The following attributes are additionally acceptable as long as masks meet the requirements above.

- Masks can be either manufactured or homemade.
- Masks can be reusable or disposable.
- Masks can have inner filter pockets.
- Clear masks or cloth masks with a clear plastic panel may be used to facilitate communication with people who are hearing impaired or others who need to see a speaker's mouth to understand speech.
- Medical masks and N-95 respirators fulfill the requirements of the Order.

The following do not fulfill the requirements of the Order.

- Masks worn in a way that does not cover both the mouth and nose.
- Face shields or goggles (face shields or goggles may be worn to supplement a mask that meets above required attributes).
- Scarves, ski masks, balaclavas, or bandannas.
- Shirt or sweater collars (e.g., turtleneck collars) pulled up over the mouth and nose.
- Masks made from loosely woven fabric or that are knitted, i.e., fabrics that let light pass through.
- Masks made from materials that are hard to breathe through (such as vinyl, plastic or leather).
- Masks containing slits, exhalation valves, or punctures.
- Masks that do not fit properly (large gaps, too loose or too tight).

The following narrow subset of persons with disabilities are exempt from the CDC's requirement to wear a mask:

- A person with a disability who, for reasons related to the disability, would be physically unable to remove a mask without assistance if breathing becomes obstructed. Examples might include a person with impaired motor skills, quadriplegia, or limb restrictions.
- A person with an intellectual, developmental, cognitive, or psychiatric disability that affects the person's ability to understand the need to remove a mask if breathing becomes obstructed.

The following persons with disabilities might be exempt from the CDC's requirement to wear a mask based on factors specific to the person:

- A person with a disability who cannot wear a mask because it would cause the person to be unable to breathe or have respiratory distress if a mask were worn over the mouth and nose. A person with a condition that causes intermittent respiratory distress, such as asthma, likely does not qualify for this exemption because people with asthma, or other similar conditions, can generally wear a mask safely.
- A person with a disability requiring the use of an assistive device, such as for mobility or communication, that prevents the person from wearing a mask and wearing or using the assistive device at the same time. If use of the device is intermittent and the person can remove the mask independently to use the device, then a mask must be worn during periods when the person is not using the device.
- A person with a severe sensory disability or a severe mental health disability who would pose an imminent threat of harm to themselves or others if required to wear a mask. Persons who experience discomfort or anxiety while wearing a mask without imminent threat of harm would not qualify for this exemption.

A driver does not need to wear a mask if they are the only person on the bus.

Additional guidance for safe school bus operations and the CDC Order can be found in the references below.

References:

- <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening.pdf>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html>
- <https://scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/2021.2022-School-Guidance-Booklet-08.25.2021.pdf>