

October 1, 2021

Dear Parents,

As you may have heard, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer and Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Education, made a joint [announcement today](#), about extending the requirement for children in schools to wear masks. This requirement to wear masks now includes all school-aged children from kindergarten through to Grade 12 while they are in school, including while at their desks and while on the bus, starting October 4, 2021.

The reason for the change as announced by Dr. Rika Gustafson is as anticipated,

K-12 case counts are increasing, as those under the age of 12 who are not yet eligible to receive a vaccination.

- The volume of testing for K-12 students has increased dramatically but the 5 -11 age group has the lowest percentage of positive diagnoses among the unvaccinated population.
- Transmission continues to be primarily from home or community gatherings/activities outside of school.
- The Delta variant is more infectious but young people are experiencing milder symptoms and illness.
- Getting vaccinated when accessible, staying home when you are sick, proper hand cleaning protocols and mask use are all effective ways to control the spread of COVID-19.

Again, many parents are worried about students wearing masks indoors all day or wearing them incorrectly. Our teachers will be using greater distancing, and more outdoor breaks to ensure that students have regular non- mask opportunities.

Our families have been amazing! Especially at following all protocols, and consistently keeping sick children home. As a result, we have had a great start to the year as we welcome back our regular student activities, and we are yet to have a COVID outbreak in the school.

Unfortunately, as the winter and flu season approaches, there is more anticipated cases of COVID and hence why announcement and change in masking for K-3.

Please let your classroom teacher know if there are any concerns with your child wearing a mask.

Please read the mask rules and exemptions from CDCBC website:

All staff, adult volunteers and visitors, and K-12 students in “bricks and mortar” schools should wear a non-medical mask or face covering (a “mask”) at all times while indoors at school, subject to the following exceptions:

- If a person is unable to wear a mask because they don't tolerate it (for health or behavioural reasons*)
- If a person unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person.

- If the mask is removed temporarily for the purposes of identifying the person wearing it.
- If the mask is removed temporarily to engage in an educational activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask (e.g., actively playing a wind instrument, high-intensity physical activity, etc.).
- If a person is eating or drinking.
- If a person is behind a barrier (e.g., a divider, a cubicle, or in a room by themselves).
- While providing a service to a person with a disability or diverse ability where visual cues, facial expressions and/or lip reading/movements are important.

Staff at non-school sites (e.g., administrative offices, maintenance facilities, etc.) should continue to follow guidance from WorkSafe BC.

If an activity cannot be implemented in line with this guidance, it should be adapted, or another activity should be selected.

Schools continue to be encouraged to support student mask use through positive and inclusive approaches, and not punitive or enforcement activities that exclude students from fully participating in school or that could result in stigma. Schools are also encouraged to ensure there are opportunities throughout the day for students to remove their masks (like providing opportunities to go outside if weather allows).

Again, I wish to congratulate our OLS parents and community for your continued efforts of staying safe, staying calm, and continuing to support one another as we continue to transition and adapt to our school year with COVID protocols.

May God continue to Bless you and your families and keep you safe!!

Sincerely,

Pasquale Balletta

Principal