



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

Following the public health emergency, 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 recommendations and orders. Decisions about supports that may be needed for individual students with IEPs should be made through an IEP team meeting or by using the I-10 form.

In addition to following precautions outlined in *Interim COVID-19 Infection Control and Mitigation Measures for Schools*, 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 IEP (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction 2020). 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.

The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) has recommendations for educators to increase successful communication while wearing facial coverings (ASHA 2020b).

- Make sure you have the attention of your listener before you start talking.
- Face your listener directly, and make sure nothing is blocking your view.
- Speak slowly and slightly louder, but do not shout or exaggerate your speech.
- Use your eyes, hands, and body language to add information to your speech. To optimize hearing—confirm that those who use hearing aids or cochlear implants are wearing their devices or use a portable amplifier.
- Provide visual references (e.g., printouts, notes, images) to accompany communication.
- Ask if your listener understood you—if they didn't, rephrase it or write it down.

- Ask them to repeat important information to see whether they understood what you said.
- Reduce competing noise in the environment, if possible.
- If you're talking with someone new, ask the person what you can do to make communication easier for both of you.

The following are additional considerations when working with students with a variety of specific needs.

- ***For students who need explicit instruction:***
 - Video modeling, social narratives, visual supports (e.g., pictures) paired with explicit instruction are recommended to help students know and understand how to use personal protective equipment, or PPE.
 - 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 practice.
 - Consider the use of plexiglass barriers.
- ***For students who need to see people's faces when communicating, consider the following:***
 - Using a facial covering with clear plastic allowing for visual access of the face and mouth when modeling specific mouth or tongue placement in the production of certain sounds. These 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.
 - Using plexiglass barriers instead of facial coverings to 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 deliver 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:***
 - 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/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.
- 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 this 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 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.

Resources

Manufacturers of facial coverings and shields with clear visual access (not an exhaustive list):

- 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>
- Lip-reading Friendly Mask <https://maketakestudio.com/friggshandmade/lip-reading-friendly-mask>

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>

Resources to Support a Variety of Student Needs

- [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](#)
- [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.

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

References

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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." https://docs.google.com/document/d/1h4xl_yF2_Cukd7JucF0Y7imHfGZG4Nja6yTP3gjONTE/edit