

# Face Mask Use in School and Childcare Settings

# Multiple Factors Contribute to a Person's Risk of COVID-19



## NH Public Health Recommendations for People Who Are Fully Vaccinated When Around Others From Outside the Household

May 17, 2021

- Due to “substantial” levels of community transmission in May, NH DPHS recommended that everybody, including fully vaccinated people, continue to wear face masks and physically distance when indoors in public settings, and around other people who may not be fully vaccinated
- Our approach has been to implement mitigation measures at a population level (based on population-level risk)
- This guidance also stated that we would re-evaluate face mask use recommendations in June, which is now...

# De-Escalating Mitigation Measures

- As population immunity increases (from vaccination and/or natural infection) and community transmission decreases, the goal is to pull back on use of some of the recommended community mitigation measures when risk/benefit is in favor of doing so
- As community transmission decreases, the risk to everybody is significantly lower so that even unvaccinated people can begin to go without masks in lower-risk settings (e.g., outdoors)

# General Face Mask Recommendations for High-Risk Settings (i.e., not school or child care specific)

- NH DPHS and CDC continue to recommend face mask use for people who are not fully vaccinated in high-risk unmonitored settings (e.g., crowded locations, indoors, prolonged periods of exposure, unable to maintain physical distancing from others)

# Are K-12 Schools and Child Care Settings Considered “High-Risk” with Classrooms of Students/Children Who are Not Fully Vaccinated?

- No, we do not consider these high-risk settings
- Children are less likely to transmit COVID-19
- Schools and childcare are controlled and monitored settings
- We also haven’t seen high-levels of spread in school or child care settings, including last summer when COVID-19 was low and face masks weren’t universally used for children in child care
- Children who are 12 years of age and older should still be encouraged to get vaccinated against COVID-19
- Schools and childcare settings can choose to safely de-escalate use of some mitigation measures...

# NH DPHS Face Mask Use Recommendations in School and Childcare Settings

- We continue to recommend a multi-layered approach to prevention of COVID-19 (as outlined in the NH [Universal Best Practices](#)) – it's not all about face masks
- As community transmission decreases, risk to individuals and communities decreases... and while face mask use continues to be an important mitigation measure (especially in high-risk settings), any single mitigation measure has less impact on overall pandemic control
- With low levels of community transmission, we want schools and childcare agencies to be free to choose to remove face mask requirements indoors (*permissive recommendation*), based on your assessment of the local situation and risk/benefit of continued mask use

# NH DPHS Face Mask Use Recommendations in School and Childcare Settings

- We suggest you can safely choose to remove face mask requirements indoors (regardless of a person's vaccination status)
- We do recommend you remove face mask requirements indoors in situations where face mask use might pose a health risk (e.g., on hot/humid days in classrooms without climate control, where children are uncomfortable and constantly touching their face or having more difficulty breathing, where heat exhaustion or dehydration might be an issue, etc.)
- We also recommend that schools and childcare agencies remove face mask requirements in outdoor settings

# Why Now the “Permissive” Recommendation? Has The Risk to Unvaccinated Children Changed?

- We continue to base our recommendations for mitigation measures on the level of community transmission
- Multiple factors contribute to a person’s risk – with low levels of community transmission, the risk to unvaccinated persons is less
- The permissive recommendation is consistent with our move to allow all businesses/organizations to apply general principles to their specific situation and context as risk decreases
- If NH DPHS felt strongly that face masks were necessary, we would recommend so... but the risk/benefit of face mask use is shifting in favor of face masks coming off, especially in lower-risk settings

# NH DPHS Guidance Is Different than CDC's

- NH DPHS continues to intentionally deviate from CDC's guidance
- CDC guidance on use of mitigation measures is largely based on an individual's vaccination status
  - Based on the science of vaccine efficacy and effectiveness
  - Difficult for businesses and organizations to implement
  - Leads to potential unwanted segregation of populations
- NH DPHS continues to base our guidance on population-level risk based on level of community transmission
- For your awareness, here is CDC's current guidance...

# CDC's Recommendations Based on Vaccination Status

- CDC's [Guidance for Fully Vaccinated](#) (updated May 13<sup>th</sup>): “Fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules and regulations...”
- CDC continues to recommend that individuals who are unvaccinated or who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth, [stay 6 feet apart from others](#) who don't live with you, avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces, and get a COVID-19 vaccine

# CDC's Recommendations for K-12 Schools and Child Care Agencies

- CDC's [K-12 School Recommendations](#): schools should continue to use current COVID-19 prevention strategies for at least the remainder of the 2020-21 school year, including:
  - Universal and correct use of masks
  - Physical distancing should be maximized
- CDC's [Child Care Guidance](#):
  - Everyone 2 years and older should wear a mask when around people who do not live in their household (except when eating or sleeping)
  - Masks should be worn in addition to physical distancing
  - Wearing a mask is especially important indoors and when physical distancing is difficult to implement or maintain

# Summary of NH DPHS Face Mask Recommendations for School and Childcare Settings

- We recommend removing the requirement for face masks outdoors
- Community transmission/risk is low enough that we suggest you can safely choose to remove face mask requirements indoors as well, and we would recommend doing so in situations where face mask use might pose a health risk
- Individuals who are concerned for their health, or people who are immunocompromised, can still choose to wear face masks (i.e., for individual protection)