



WCASD Mask Optional FAQs

March 2, 2022

On Friday, February 25, 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued new metrics for measuring the impact of COVID-19, a community-based tool for evaluating COVID-19, and revised mitigation strategies.

The WCASD designed its Health and Safety Plan in a way that is responsive to changing guidance from relevant health authorities such as the CDC. **As a result, WCASD transitioned to mask optional effective Monday, February 28, 2022.**

Below is a summary of the new guidelines and answers to some frequently asked questions the District has received from our community.

Summary of [CDC Guidelines and Impact Metrics](#) Issued February 25, 2022:

- The CDC now identifies COVID-19's impact on local communities with three levels: low, medium, and high.
- The metrics used to determine a community's level are: the percentage of hospital beds being used for COVID-positive patients, new COVID hospital admissions, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area.
- Masking indoors in public spaces, including schools, is impacted by these levels.
- While the CDC states that individuals may choose to wear a mask at any time regardless of the community level, it is recommended that individuals should mask indoors when the community level is high.
- As of the issuing of this guidance, Chester County was within the medium community level. In the medium community level, the CDC indicates that individuals who are at high risk for severe illness should talk to their healthcare provider about the need to wear a mask and take other precautions.

Why did the District make this change without much advanced notice?

- The District's Health and Safety plan (approved 8/23/21) is designed to be responsive to changes in guidance from the Chester County Health Department, the PA Department of Health, and the CDC. When the timelines for quarantining changed and when contact tracing was no longer authorized, the District implemented both of these changes promptly.
- The Health and Safety Plan (approved 8/23/21) language that guides this change is as follows: *The West Chester Area School District will adhere to any changes*



in guidance as recommended by the Chester County Health Department, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the CDC.

How has the District focused on implementing mask optional?

- Principals communicated a consistent, kind, and thoughtful message for students upon arrival to school. The message acknowledged that this was a big change for students and asked that all members of the school community remain respectful of each other.
- The District has also prepared messaging and talking points for teachers to share with their students in the classroom.
- To allow for adjustment and planning, classrooms and school cafeterias have remained in one-directional seating arrangements. Classrooms will phase in flexible seating arrangements and furniture beginning next week (March 7, 2022), and cafeteria seating will remain one-directional until March 11, 2022.

How will the District address students and staff who are immunocompromised or have other health-related concerns?

- Parents who may have concerns for their children are encouraged to contact their principal or school nurse. We will work closely with families to provide necessary accommodations.
- Staff who may have concerns regarding their health are also encouraged to speak with their principal or supervisor. Principals and supervisors will work with staff and WCASD's human resources to provide necessary accommodations.

Will masks still be required in the early childhood education classrooms or programs?

- Masks are required for students and staff when working in early childhood education classrooms as well as for the children within these programs.
- This requirement aligns with the CDC recommendation for Headstart pre-school programs to continue mask wearing while in medium or high.

How will the District handle students who tested positive for COVID-19 and return to school on day five (5), but have a mask exemption? Will they be required to stay home for the additional five (5) days or be required to wear a mask in school?



- They will be required to wear a mask in school. If they choose not to, they will need to remain at home for the full ten days per the current CDC isolation guidance.

Will “Nurse Exclusions” still be offered as a form of student absence?

- Nurse Exclusion absences will still be available for students with a documented, active case of COVID-19.

How will the District monitor the CDC COVID-19 County Check and how will COVID information be communicated to staff and families?

- The District’s COVID-19 Dashboard will still be available on our website and will be updated every Tuesday and Friday.
- The District has also linked the CDC COVID-19 County Check underneath the COVID-19 Dashboard so that our families and staff can check anytime they wish.

What is the District’s plan for re-implementing mandatory masks if we transition to high community levels?

- If we do enter the “high” community level, our current Health and Safety Plan (approved 8/23/21) is still in effect, and it requires masks in “high.”