

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Face coverings in education settings

What is the public health advice about face coverings in schools and early learning services?

Here is a statement from Director of Public Health Dr Caroline McElnay:

We have carefully looked at the evidence around COVID-19 and educational settings, and at the experience of other countries in responding to COVID-19 in these settings to inform the public health advice about face coverings (including masks) for children and young people at school and early learning services.

When reviewing the evidence for children and young people, we have considered the potential benefits of reducing the spread of the virus, and any potential harms or risks.

The purpose of wearing a face covering wrapped around your nose and mouth is to prevent the spread of infection between people. With the other public health measures we have put in place in schools and early learning services, coupled with the reduced risk of transmission at Alert Level 2, we consider the risk of infection is low.

At Alert Level 2 schools and early learning services are reinforcing good hygiene practices, are undertaking regular cleaning, and staff, children and young people are staying away if they are sick. Where practicable, physical distancing is in place, particularly between adults.

Overall, we think it is important not to interfere with learning as much as possible, so it's about balancing up the benefits against the potential harms. Our experience in New Zealand and overseas with COVID-19 shows that it does not affect children and teens in the same way it does adults. Compared to other places, schools and early learning services are not environments where we have seen significant spread of COVID-19. Household members and work colleagues who are in close contact with people with COVID-19, are the most common sources of transmission.

Children and teens don't become as unwell if they do get infected, and they don't tend to pass the virus on so much as adults in the classroom setting.

Based on what we know about face coverings and transmission in children, we are taking this balanced approach at this time. If new evidence emerges, this guidance will be revised.

Can children, young people or teachers wear face coverings at school or early learning services if they wish to?

Yes. Any children, young people or teachers who wish to wear face coverings wrapped around the nose and mouth (including masks) at schools or early learning services may do so if they want to. They are entitled to make this decision and should not be criticised for doing so.

Alert Level 2 advice

Do children and young people need to wear face coverings at schools at Alert Level 2?

No. Children and young people do not need to wear face coverings because the risk of infection within the school environment is low. Other public health control measures will be in place including children and staff staying home if they are sick, contact tracing, and hygiene requirements.

Do teachers need to wear face coverings at early learning services and schools at Alert Level 2?

No. Teachers do not need to wear face coverings at Alert Level 2. Other public health measures will be in place including children and staff staying home if they are sick, contact tracing, and hygiene requirements.

Do children and young people need to wear face coverings on school transport, or transport provided by early learning services, at Alert Level 2?

No. Children and young people are not required to wear face coverings wrapped around the nose and mouth on school transport or early learning service transport. This includes buses or vans chartered or used by schools or early learning services to carry children, students and staff. Good hygiene measures, contact tracing and staying away if sick will remain in place.

Do all children and young people need to wear face coverings on public transport at Alert Level 2?

No. Children **under 12** years of age are **not** required to wear face coverings on public transport at Alert Level 2.

Children **aged 12 and over** are required to wear face coverings at Alert Level 2 (as are the majority of New Zealanders).

Who is exempted from wearing face coverings on public transport at Alert Level 2?

Children **under 12** years of age are **not** required to wear face coverings on public transport at Alert Level 2.

For people with a physical or mental health illness or condition or disability that makes wearing a face covering unsuitable, they will be exempted from having to wear a face covering on public transport.

Further information on face coverings is available on the [covid19.govt.nz website](https://www.covid19.govt.nz).

Alert Level 3 advice

Do children or young people need to wear face coverings at schools at Alert Level 3?

No. Children and young people do not need to wear face coverings if they remain within their school bubble of up to 20 children. This includes staying at least 2 metres away from children from other school bubbles outside. Other public health control measures will be in place including children and staff staying home if they are sick, contact tracing, and hygiene requirements.

Do children and young people need to wear face coverings on school transport, or transport provided by early learning services, at Alert Level 3?

No. School transport is unlikely to run at Alert Level 3.

If it is operating, children and young people are **not required** to wear face coverings wrapped around the nose and mouth on school or early learning service transport. This includes buses or vans chartered or used by schools or early learning services to carry children, students and staff. Good hygiene measures, contact tracing and staying away if sick should remain in place.

Do all children and young people need to wear face coverings on public transport at Alert Level 3?

No. Children **under 12** years of age are **not** required to wear face coverings on public transport at Alert Level 3.

Children **aged 12 and over** are required to wear face coverings at Alert Level 3 (as are the majority of New Zealanders).

Who is exempted from wearing face coverings on public transport at Alert Level 3?

Children **under 12** years of age are **not** required to wear face coverings on public transport at Alert Level 3.

For people with a physical or mental health illness or condition or disability that makes wearing a face covering unsuitable, they will be exempted from having to wear a face covering on public transport.

Further information on face coverings is available on the [covid19.govt.nz website](https://www.covid19.govt.nz).

