

## RESPONSE TO SCIENTIFIC/TECHNICAL REQUEST

# Masking during gym/exercise

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### Question

Are students and staff recommended to wear a mask during indoor gymnasium/exercise classes?

### Response

Recognizing that there may be policy/guidance from provincial or local decision-makers for schools to consider (e.g., Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, local boards of education), considerations for reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission include:

- Indoor gymnasiums should only be used when physical distancing of at least 2 metres can be consistently maintained and use of shared equipment and/or shared spaces is limited.
- Wearing a mask during exercise is most important when physical distancing is difficult and when exercise type and intensity allows for safe use.
- From episodes of COVID-19 spread in [group exercise environments](#), characteristics that might have led to transmission include large class sizes, small spaces, and intensity of the workouts.
- Students who can comfortably exercise indoors with a mask on should do so, such as for low intensity exercise that does not significantly increase heart rate and breathing (e.g. yoga, stretching)
- Vigorous-intensity exercise should be done outside, where possible. If physical distancing of 2 metres can be maintained while outside, a mask would not be required
- Staff are recommended to use appropriate personal protective equipment (including masking) while indoors and outdoors when 2 metres physical distancing cannot be consistently maintained.

### Rationale

- In general, while indoors, students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged (but not required) to wear masks while students in Grades 4 to 12 are required to wear a mask. Masks are not required while outside but other measures are still recommended (e.g., physical distancing, remaining within your cohort, hand hygiene, etc.). Staff who are regularly in close contact with students are recommended to wear medical masks at all times and eye protection (e.g., face shield, goggles, safety glasses) if 2 metres physical distancing cannot be maintained.

- [Physical and Health Education Canada \(PHE Canada\)](#) has provided recommendations for mask use during physical education:
  - Physical education should be delivered outdoors whenever possible.
  - It is not advisable to wear a mask during intense cardio vascular endurance activities. Plan accordingly to ensure that vigorous intensity activities are only done in areas where masks would not be required.
  - If students are required to wear a mask in their physical education space, select lower impact activities to minimize risks.
- Mask use may be tolerable for individuals during high intensity exercise
- Indoor gymnasiums should only be used when physical distancing measures can be followed.
  - Examples of exercise where physical distancing can usually be maintained include yoga where participants are spaced out by at least 2 metres and individual skills building (e.g. dribbling, kicking, strength training) .
  - Examples of exercise where physical distancing can be challenging/is not possible include tag, wrestling, and team activities/sports (e.g. soccer, basketball).
- Students/staff must practice proper hand hygiene before and after play/use of shared equipment. In addition, shared [equipment should be cleaned](#) between cohort/group use. Consider use of gym equipment that does not require use of hands such as agility ladders and pylons.
- Outdoor times (e.g. outdoor gym class, recess) can be used as opportunities to provide students with breaks from wearing masks within their cohorts. Outdoor gym classes, exercise, and sports are preferred to indoors in order to reduce transmission risk. Physical distancing while outside is recommended between cohorts, and as practical/possible, within cohorts.
- Attention should also be given around [processes and behaviours](#) associated with exercising/gym class itself (e.g. use of locker rooms, showers, towels, and water bottles; avoiding direct and close physical contact, such as high fives, handshakes, fist bumps, and hugs; avoiding spitting) with consideration of how to reduce person to person contact and spread of droplets.

## Resources

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)<sup>1</sup> information on Personal and Social Activities during COVID-19
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)<sup>2</sup> information on Playing Sports during COVID-19
- [Operational guidance: COVID-19 management in schools](#)<sup>3</sup> intended to support school boards and school authorities in managing COVID-19 in schools.
- [COVID-19 Preparedness and Prevention in Elementary and Secondary \(K-12\) Schools](#)<sup>4</sup> provides a checklist that can be used by elementary and secondary school administrators and public health units staff who may be conducting assessments/inspections in collaboration with schools.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/personal-social-activities.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/playing-sports.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/operational-guidance-covid-19-management-schools>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/sch/09/covid-19-checklist-preparedness-schools.pdf?la=en>

- [Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education](#)<sup>5</sup> Clothing, Footwear (and Non-Medical Masks)
- [Physical and Health Education Canada](#)<sup>6</sup> **New Health Protocols in Physical and Health Education**
- [Public Health Ontario's](#)<sup>7</sup> Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings document

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<sup>5</sup> <https://safety.ophea.net/tools-resources/clothing-footwear-and-non-medical-masks?parents=covid-19-considerations-physical-education&safety-criteria-considerations>

<sup>6</sup> [https://phecanada.ca/sites/default/files/content/docs/Home Learning Resource/Back to School/New Health Protocols in PHE\\_EN.pdf](https://phecanada.ca/sites/default/files/content/docs/Home Learning Resource/Back to School/New Health Protocols in PHE_EN.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>