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Influenza Preparedness for Schools

Guidelines for Use of Facemasks

1. What is a facemask?

Facemasks are one tool utilized for preventing the spread of disease. Facemasks are loose-fitting masks that cover the nose and mouth, and have ear loops or ties or bands at the back of the head. There are many different brands and they come in different colors. Facemasks are different than “respirators,” another tool that can be used by health care providers to prevent the spread of disease

2. When should a facemask be worn?

In community settings, the use of a facemask is generally not recommended. However, two instances in school settings warrant consideration:

- When students and staff exhibit signs of influenza-like illness (fever and cough or sneeze), they may be offered a mask to wear while waiting in the health office (or other monitored area) until they are leaving the campus.
- When a health care provider (e.g., school nurse) is examining students or staff that have signs of influenza-like illness.

3. Where should facemasks be stored?

Facemasks for ill students and staff should be stored in the health office where they can be appropriately distributed and utilized.

4. How do you put on a facemask?

- Clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer before touching the mask.
- Remove a mask from the box and make sure there are no obvious tears or holes in either side of the mask.
- Determine which side of the mask is the top. The side of the mask that has a stiff bendable edge is the top and is meant to mold to the shape of your nose.
- Determine which side of the mask is the front. The colored side of the mask is usually the front and should face away from you, while the white side touches your face.

- *Facemask with ear loops*: Hold the mask by the ear loops. Place a loop around each ear.
- *Facemask with ties*: Bring the mask to your nose level and place the ties over the crown of your head and secure with a bow.
- Mold or pinch the stiff edge to the shape of your nose.
- Pull the bottom of the mask over your mouth and chin.

5. How do you take off a facemask?

- Avoid touching the front of the mask. The front of the mask is contaminated. Only touch the ear loops/ties.
- *Facemask with ear loops*: Hold both of the ear loops and gently lift and remove the mask.
- *Facemask with ties*: Untie the bottom bow first then untie the top bow and pull the mask away from you as the ties are loosened.
- Throw the mask in the trash.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer.

6. How long should you wear a facemask?

Facemasks are not designed to be used for prolonged periods of time. They should be used once and thrown away in the trash.

7. Are ill students and staff required to use a facemask while waiting to go home?

If facemasks are available, they may be provided to persons described in question #2. Only use a facemask if tolerated, and never force a student or staff member to wear a facemask. Other methods of decreasing the spread of disease include:

- Maintain a distance of 6 feet or more from an ill person
- Follow good cough and sneeze etiquette
- Frequent hand washing
- Avoid touching face, eyes, nose and mouth with hands.

8. Can students and staff members who are not ill wear a facemask?

Other than for those staff members who are examining ill children, this is not recommended by public health officials, and schools should not encourage use of facemasks by the general population. Instances where there are questions on facemask use should be directed to the school nurse or local district nursing office.