

Dear Parents and Whānau,

Public Health advice about masks and face coverings in schools and early learning services.

Statement from Dr Caroline McElnay, Director of Public Health for the New Zealand Ministry of Health

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 public health measures we have put in place in schools and early learning centres, we consider the risk of infection is low.

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. Early learning or school bubbles at Alert level 3 already sufficiently reduces the risk of spreading infection without introducing any potential harms or risks from the use of face coverings (such as breathing issues or masks not properly fitted). 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

Do children need to wear face coverings at early learning services at level 2?

No. Public Health officials have advised that children under the age of 6 should not wear face coverings. 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 at schools at 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 level 2?

No. Teachers do not need to wear face coverings at 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 or public transport at Alert level 2?

Children and young people are not required but encouraged to wear face coverings wrapped around the nose and mouth on school transport.