**Information sheet: Advice on mask wearing**

We know that wearing a mask helps to protect us from catching and spreading a range of illnesses. As we continue into the middle of winter with colds, flu and COVID-19 circulating, a good rule of thumb is to wear a mask when outside your home particularly in places where it’s difficult to physically distance, in enclosed spaces with poor air quality and when coming into contact with vulnerable people such as those in hospitals or aged residential care.

In schools, face masks are strongly encouraged to be used by ākonga and staff in Years 4-13 when indoors to slow the spread of COVID-19. If large gatherings such as assemblies are to take place, face masks are strongly recommended.

**Mask wearing is recommended for first 4 weeks of Term 3**

At the start of Term 3, 2022, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health strongly recommend that all schools and kura amend their mask policy for the first four weeks of term to require mask wearing in all indoor settings (where it will not have a significant impact on teaching and learning) for students in Years 4 and above.

This recommendation does not include any situation where mask wearing might not be practicable, such as while eating and drinking, playing certain musical instruments, indoor sport, where it will have a significant impact on teaching and learning (for example, students with particular learning needs), certain activities such as singing or drama performance on stage, and PE. In these situations, particular attention should be paid to ensuring there is good ventilation during the activity, and physical distancing where practicable.

**Fitting a mask properly**

How well a mask protects you depends on how well it fits to the face and how well it filters the air. If there are big gaps around the mask it will be less effective because it is easier for the air to travel through the gaps and very little air will be filtered through the mask material.

For the most effective protection, it is essential to choose a good quality mask for you or your tamariki, that fits well, and to wear it consistently and correctly according to the instructions for its use. Find a mask that best fits to cover nose, mouth, and chin without gaps above, below or on the sides.

This can be a reusable fabric mask with three layers or a medical disposable mask. Many fabric masks (either purchased or made) come in child sizes. For commonly available medical masks, you can use the knot and tuck technique to improve the fit to a child's face.

Guidance on face mask types and how to wear them is available on the Unite Against COVID-19 website.

[Face masks – Unite Against COVID-19](https://covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/keep-up-healthy-habits/face-masks/)