



Education Report: Providing medical-grade masks for teachers and other education workers in schools and kura

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	28 January 2022	Priority:	High
Security level:	In Confidence	METIS №:	1280814
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Purpose of Report

This paper seeks your agreement to provide masks for teachers and other education workers who are required to wear a medical-grade mask. This would be funded from an underspend in Ka Ora, Ka Ako | healthy school lunches programme.

Summary

- 1 From Term 1 2022, teachers and other education workers in schools and kura will be required to wear a medical-grade mask in the workplace. Given that there are now specific requirements relating to the type of mask that must be worn, there is a strong expectation from the sector that schools and kura are provided with appropriate masks.
- 2 We recommend that medical-grade masks be provided to all schools and kura for teachers and other workers covered by the mandate, while these mask requirements remain in place. Learners in Year 4 and above are also required to wear masks; however, the same requirements do not exist as to the type of masks, therefore we do not recommend funding these masks at this stage.
- 3 We have secured an initial supply of medical-grade masks from the Ministry of Health but we estimate this will only be enough to cover an initial eight working day period. Continuing the provision of masks past this period will come at a significant cost, estimated at \$8.5m for the next three months. We have secured an additional supply of masks for this three-month period and are working with suppliers to make this available to schools and kura as soon as possible.
- 4 The cost of covering this initial three-month period can be met from an underspend in Ka Ora, Ka Ako | healthy school lunches programme. These underspends are available due to reduced demand as a result of lockdowns, but underspends are unlikely after the 2021/22 financial year. Central provision of masks for this three-month period is likely to create an expectation that this continues longer-term; however, this is not a sustainable long-term funding model. If the requirement to wear medical-grade masks extends beyond the initial three-month funding available, new funding may need to be sought from the centre.

Recommended actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

- a. **note** that the cost of providing medical-grade masks for a three-month period is estimated at \$8.5m, to be covered from an underspend in the Ka Ora, Ka Ako | healthy school lunches programme;

Noted

- b. **note** that due to significant supply constraints we have placed an order of medical-grade masks to secure delivery

Noted

- c. **agree** to provide medical-grade masks to teachers and other education workers in schools and kura, while the requirement to wear medical-grade masks exists;

Agree Disagree


- d. **note** that at the end of the initial three-month period, there is no obvious funding source to continue provision and, if required, funding would likely need to be sought from the centre;

Noted

- e. **agree** that this briefing is proactively released once decisions are made and communicated with the sector.

Agree Disagree


Andy Jackson
Hautū | Deputy Secretary
Te Puna Kaupapare | Policy


Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

28/1/2022

29/ 1 /2022

I would also like MOE to source a supply of masks for school students. Around 10 masks per students for high decile schools and 20 masks per student for low decile schools. These should be purchased and distributed to schools as soon as possible for the schools to use at their discretion.

Background

- 1 New requirements for any worker covered by a vaccine mandate to wear a medical-grade face mask in their workplace were announced on 25 January 2022. These will apply when schools reopen for Term 1. While the Alert Level 3 system has required the schooling workforce supporting years 4 – 13 to wear a face covering while indoors at a school or kura, a specific type of mask was not required.
- 2 A full breakdown of possible costs, supply and distribution options was provided to your office on 27 January 2022 [METIS 1280629 refers].

Providing medical-grade masks for the schooling workforce

- 3 We recommend that medical-grade masks are made available for all schools and kura, given that there are now specific requirements relating to the type of mask that must be worn by the schooling workforce. Where schools or individual staff members have their own supply of masks that meet the required standards, they will be encouraged to use these.
- 4 At this stage we do not consider that it is necessary to provide masks for children. While learners in Years 4 and above will need to wear a face covering, there is greater flexibility around the type that can be worn. This includes fabric masks and medical-grade disposable masks.

Providing masks for the schooling workforce will incur significant costs

- 5 A significant number of masks will be required for the schooling workforce. We have secured an initial supply of medical-grade masks from the Ministry of Health; however, we estimate this will only cover eight working days. Schools will be able to place orders in the week beginning 31 January.
- 6 Continuing provision of masks beyond this eight-day period will come at a significant cost; however, we consider that it is necessary. While there is no legal obligation for us to provide these masks, there is a strong expectation from the sector that masks are provided for the schooling workforce. If they are not, this cost would be passed onto individual schools and kura, with trade-offs made to teaching and learning or other operating costs.
- 7 We estimate the cost of providing masks (supply and distribution) for the schooling workforce for a three-month period to be \$8.5million.

Costs can be met internally but only for an initial three-month period

- 8 We are needing to operate at pace to ensure the timely supply of appropriate masks to schools and kura. We have identified an underspend in the Ka Ora, Ka Ako | healthy school lunches programme, which can be used to fund the provision of masks for an initial three-month period. This underspend has resulted from periods of school closure due to lockdowns in 2021, which reduced demand. We do not anticipate underpends in this programme after the 2021/22 financial year.
- 9 The correct scope for this appropriation is within the Primary and Secondary Multi-Category Appropriations. These are currently overspent, albeit that an upwards forecast change is proposed in the March Baseline Update. We therefore propose transferring

\$8.5m from Ka Ora, Ka Ako | healthy school lunches programme in order to afford the initial supply.

- 10 This will likely exhaust all available funding which will mean further provision beyond this three-month period is not possible. It is likely that if medical-grade masks are still required to be worn by the schooling workforce at this stage, the expectation that these are provided centrally will have been strengthened. Further funding may therefore need to be sought from the centre.
- 11 We have engaged with the Treasury on this proposed approach and advised them that our ability to fund this internally only extends for three months.

Next steps

- 12 As noted, an initial supply of medical-grade masks has been secured from the Ministry of Health. Schools will therefore be able to order masks from the week beginning 31 January.
- 13 We have also secured the supply of masks for an additional three-month period and due to significant supply constraints, have placed an order for these masks to secure delivery. We are working with suppliers to make these masks available for schools as soon as possible, pending your agreement.