

## Fall 2021 Best Practices for PTA Programs and Meetings

PTAs should ensure our programs and meetings support a healthy return to full-time in-person learning by following current guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Virginia Health Department (VDH), American Association of Pediatrics (AAP), and Richmond and Henrico Health District.

PTAs hosting events on-campus are required to follow your school's health plan and [HCPS policies](#). To host an event on campus, work with your principal, who will submit a "[transition plan](#)" to HCPS. Allow at least three (3) weeks for this process of submitting a plan, answering additional questions or making modifications as needed, and receiving final approval.

HCPS will follow the [Virginia Department of Education guidance](#) updated on August 12, 2021. This is consistent with CDC guidance for schools. Highlights include:

- Masks will continue to be required when **indoors** on school property.
  - Please see a [graphic representation](#) of the nuances of indoor mask use.
- While **outdoors**, masks will still be strongly recommended, especially for individuals who are not yet vaccinated, or when physical distancing is not possible.
- If individuals are not fully vaccinated, they must wear a mask unless they can maintain at least six feet of distance.

PTAs host events for students and/or their caretakers, which can affect the classroom and student access to in-person education regardless of where it takes place. PTAs operating off-campus are encouraged to follow the same standards followed by HCPS COVID-19, but as a separate 501c3 are not bound to it. Below is the guidance provided to schools and the general public.

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### What the Guidance Says

#### [Richmond and Henrico Health Districts](#) (July 30, 2021)

- Everyone should wear a mask indoors while around others who are not a part of their household, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status.
- Both Richmond City and Henrico County are experiencing high community transmission. This local recommendation will remain in effect until otherwise notified, even if community transmission dips to substantial, moderate or low levels.

#### CDC Guidance for vaccinated individuals (July 27, 2021)

- Americans should resume wearing masks indoors in areas where there are more than 50 new infections per 100,000 residents over the previous seven days, or more than 8 percent of tests are positive for infection over that period. *This is the same definition as “substantial” spread.*

#### [Virginia Department of Health and Virginia Department of Education Guidelines](#) (July 21, 2021)

- On August 12, 2021, State Health Commissioner Dr. M. Norman Oliver issued a [Public Health Order](#) requiring all students, teachers, staff, and visitors in K-12 schools aged two years and older to wear masks indoors, regardless of vaccination status. All Virginia public and private K-12 schools (including PreK classrooms) must implement a requirement that students, teachers, and staff wear masks indoors, *regardless of vaccination status*. Please refer to the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information regarding this Public Health Order.
- Schools should follow [Interim Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Virginia PreK-12 Schools](#) (Sept. 10, 2021). This guidance emphasizes several key prevention strategies, including vaccination, masking, physical distancing, screening testing, ventilation, hand hygiene, cleaning, staying home when sick, and prompt contact tracing once any cases are identified. Of all available prevention strategies, vaccination, masking, and physical distancing should be prioritized.
- Divisions must also adhere to any other federal laws or regulations related to masks, such as the [CDC Order](#) requiring mask wearing on public transportation, which applies to school buses.
- Maintain at least 6 feet between adults who are not fully vaccinated, and between adults and students, at all times in the school building to the maximum extent possible.
- Students should be at least 3 feet apart combined with indoor mask-wearing by those persons who are not fully vaccinated in areas of low, moderate, or substantial community transmission.

#### [American Association of Pediatrics](#) (July 17, 2021)

- All students older than 2 years and all school staff should wear face masks at school (unless medical or developmental conditions prohibit use).
- The AAP also amplifies the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s [recommendations](#) for building ventilation, testing, quarantining, cleaning and disinfection in the updated guidance.

#### [CDC Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#) (updated August 5, 2021)

- Masks should be worn **indoors** by all individuals (age 2 and older) who are not fully vaccinated.
- In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors. However, particularly in areas of [substantial to high transmission](#), CDC recommends that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded **outdoor** settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact

with other people who are not fully vaccinated. *As of Sept. 30, there is a high level of community spread in Henrico County. Distinctions between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals are less important, meaning your event may require masks unless social distancing can be maintained.*

- CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students, combined with indoor masking by people who are unvaccinated, to reduce transmission risk.
- Many schools serve children under the age of 12 who are not eligible for vaccination at this time. Therefore, this guidance emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies (e.g., using multiple prevention strategies together consistently) to protect people who are not fully vaccinated, including students, teachers, staff, and other members of their households.

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## FAQ

### **Q. Are PTAs allowed to ask individuals to wear masks even when it is not required?**

**A.** According to the [Governor's Office Executive Order FAQ](#), "any private entity may adopt a mask policy that is more stringent than the Executive Order, so long as the entity's policy does not violate state or federal law." There are exceptions to mask requirements for certain individuals ([EO 79 Section C](#)).

### **Q: My event is outside. Are masks needed?**

**A:** Possibly. The CDC recommends during times of substantial or high spread, like in Henrico, that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated. Your event may require masks for unvaccinated individuals if distancing cannot be maintained. *Note that the CDC's masking recommendation removes consideration of vaccination status.*

### **Q: Do we have to contact trace everyone?**

**A:** It is helpful, but not required, to know who is at PTA events for the purposes of contact tracing. This can be done through a sign-in sheet. Encourage the use of the VDH [COVID-Wise app](#) or consider a family seating chart for indoor events if 6 feet cannot be maintained between families to aid in contact tracing of students. Please inform guests if a positive case becomes known without naming the participant.

### **Q. Other than masks and distancing, is there anything we need to consider?**

**A.** Other important layers of prevention include asking participants to screen for symptoms, increasing ventilation, encouraging handwashing, keeping information for contact tracing (indoor events), and frequent cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces.

### **Q: What if my principal says no, but another school did it?**

**A:** The principal is the final decision maker for what will happen on your campus based on what is manageable for your school. School Board Members and others at HCPS will not "overrule" the principal. If the problem is that your school, including the principal, sought to do something similar to another school and the transition plan was denied by HCPS, please contact us.