

DATE: May 3, 2022

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: KN95 Masks for Edmonton Public Students and Staff
(Response to Request for Information #006)

ORIGINATOR: Kathy Muhlethaler, Assistant Superintendent Operations and Learning Services

**RESOURCE
STAFF:** Nancy Petersen, Christopher Wright

ISSUE

On February 5, 2022, Trustee Sumar requested the following information:

1. According to Alberta Health Services (AHS) and Health experts, what is the intended use of 3-ply medical grade masks? How can these masks prevent the dispersion or inhalation of aerosols and droplets?
2. Similarly, what is the intended use of N95 masks? How can these masks prevent the dispersion or inhalation of aerosols and droplets?
3. Are masks intended to protect the individual wearing the mask or others around that individual? What are the benefits to the community? What are the benefits to the healthcare system?
4. When looking at other school divisions both across Alberta and Canada, where have N95 masks been provided to staff? Where have these been provided to students?
5. Are there other masks that are considered similar or equivalent to N95 masks?
6. What would the approximate unit cost be for a pediatric N95 or similar mask?
7. What would the approximate unit cost for an N95 or similar mask be for a staff member or mature student?
8. Donations of N95 and KN95 masks have been made to staff. Is there a mechanism for members of the community to donate masks to students or for the division to accept financial donations to purchase masks?
9. What does AHS currently say about the efficacy of N95 masks for children?
10. Is this information consistent with what has been provided to school divisions from other health authorities in Canada? Provincial and federal.

BACKGROUND

Throughout the pandemic, safety has been a critical aspect of school operations. To support the return to in-person learning in the fall of 2020, the Division developed a COVID-19 School Plan. A key area of focus of the plan was the safety and well-being of staff and students. Safety guidance in the Division's plan reflects direction from Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) and the Minister of Education.

To support safety in schools for a return to in-person learning, the Division's COVID plan uses a range of strategies identified by AHS and the CMOH to help mitigate the risk of COVID-19. Over the past two years the strategies in the plan have changed with the evolving nature of public health information and have included such things as:

- Daily health checklist for staff and students prior to coming to school
- Staying home when sick or have symptoms of illness
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting protocols
- Strategies that promote physical distancing where possible
- Cohorting of student groups
- The wearing of masks for staff and students
- Hosting vaccine clinics in partnership with Alberta Health Services

Since the summer of 2020, health officials, including Alberta's Chief Medical Officer, have identified the role of masks in helping to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The return to in-person learning in the fall of 2020 included a provincial mask mandate, with the ability for school boards to set further masking requirements based on their own local context. The provincial mask mandate ceased in the spring of 2022 and [under direction from the Province](#), school boards were no longer able to set their own local mask mandate.

Currently the provincial [Guidance for Schools \(K-12\) and School Buses](#) states that, "Masking during the school day remains a personal health choice for students and their parents/guardians". The most up-to-date provincial information from Alberta Health Services pertaining to masks can be found on the Government of Alberta [website](#).

Current Situation:

On February 5, 2022, Trustee Sumar submitted the following questions to administration around masks during COVID-19. It needs to be noted that Division administration are not experts in the area of health. Many of these questions require the expertise and knowledge of health officials. The following responses are not that of administration, but reflect guidance and information from AHS, CMOH and other health authorities.

According to Alberta Health Services and health experts, what is the intended use of 3-ply medical grade masks? How can these masks prevent the dispersion or inhalation of aerosols and droplets?

To help Albertans better understand the role masks can play in minimizing the transmission of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, Alberta Health has developed a [mask guidance page](#) on the Government of Alberta's website. This page covers a range of topics related to masks including:

- Why use a mask
- When to use a mask
- When not to use a mask
- How to ensure your mask has a good fit
- How to wear a mask
- How to remove a mask
- What not to do with your mask
- How to take care of your mask
- Cloth masks
- Medical and respirator use

The Alberta Health website states:

A well-constructed, well-fitting and properly worn mask can help protect you and others from COVID-19.

- *A mask can prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating people, surfaces and/or objects.*
- *Wearing a mask can help to reduce your risk of becoming infected with COVID-19.*

Similarly, what is the intended use of N95 masks? How can these masks prevent the dispersion or inhalation of aerosols and droplets?

According to the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#) (FDA), “N95 respirators and surgical masks are examples of personal protective equipment that are used to protect the wearer from particles or from liquid contaminating the face. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) also regulates N95 respirators”. The FDA further explains, “an N95 respirator is a respiratory protective device designed to achieve a very close facial fit and very efficient filtration of airborne particles. Note that the edges of the respirator are designed to form a seal around the nose and mouth. Surgical N95 Respirators are commonly used in healthcare settings....”.

[The CDC Personal Protective Equipment: Questions and Answers](#) website states the following:

An N95 FFR is a type of respirator which removes particles from the air that are breathed through it. These respirators filter out at least 95 per cent of very small (0.3 micron) particles. N95 FFRs are capable of filtering out all types of particles, including bacteria and viruses.

Are masks intended to protect the individual wearing the mask or others around the individual?

- **What are the benefits to the community?**
- **What are the benefits to the healthcare system?**

Throughout the pandemic many health officials have determined that wearing a mask protects both the individual wearing the mask and those people around that individual. [AHS's mask guidance](#) website page states: “A well-constructed, well-fitting and properly worn mask can help protect you and others from COVID-19.” This in turn helps to protect the integrity of the healthcare system.

When looking at other school divisions both across Alberta and Canada, where have N95 masks been provided to staff? Where have these been provided to students?

Based on an environmental scan of the internet and news releases, the following areas across Canada provided N95 masks to staff or students as a response to the pandemic:

- January 2022: Calgary Public and Calgary Catholic provided all school-based staff with N95 masks
- April 2021: Seven Oaks School Division in Manitoba provided N95 masks for all frontline staff
- January 2022: West Vancouver School District provided each school-based staff member with five N95 masks
- January 2022: Ontario government provided N95 masks for teachers and 3-ply cloth masks for students
 - February 2022: Toronto Public Schools purchased medical masks (not N95) for students from February to the end of June

Are there other masks that are considered similar or equivalent to N95 masks?

Health officials and governing regulatory bodies, such as the FDA, determine the purpose and efficacy of a mask. Throughout the pandemic a lot has been written by health experts about masks. The efficacy of which masks should be used to help mitigate COVID-19 has evolved as new variants have appeared.

- AHS has developed a [document](#) that describes the different types of masks and when to use them. This document is linked on the AHS mask guidance page on the Government of Alberta website.
- The [CDC's website](#) provides an overview of the various types of masks and respirators; this page identifies N95 and KN95 as masks recommended for use in response to the Omicron variant.

What would the approximate unit cost be for a pediatric N95 or similar mask?

The approximate unit cost for 'pediatric' N95 masks is \$1.80 each.

What would the approximate unit cost for an N95 or similar mask be for a staff member or mature student?

The approximate unit cost for 'adult' N95 masks is \$1.30 each.

Donations of N95 and KN95 masks have been made to staff. Is there a mechanism for members of the community to donate masks to students or for the Division to accept financial donations to purchase masks?

Individuals, businesses or organizations wishing to donate masks for staff or students can reach out to the Division and will be put in touch with a member of administration.

What does AHS currently say about the efficacy of N95 masks for children? Is this information consistent with what has been provided to school divisions from other health authorities in Canada? Provincial and federal.

The information on the [Government of Alberta's website](#) pertaining to masks does not directly address children using a N95 mask. It does encourage children over the age of two to wear a mask to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses and notes the importance of the mask fitting well and being of high quality.

In respect to other provinces, a scan of health websites across Canada revealed the following:

- [Quebec](#) continues to have a mask mandate for schools, but does not have information specific to N95 masks.
- [Ontario's provincial website](#) provides information around the general use of masks, but does not address N95 masks specifically. Masks are no longer mandated in school.
- [British Columbia's provincial website](#) states that masks are a personal choice, encourages individuals to wear one and does not address N95 masks specifically. Masks are no longer mandated in school.
- [Government of Canada provides a chart](#) comparing the various types of masks. This chart includes respirator masks, such as N95s. This chart makes a reference to small sized masks that would be the appropriate fit for children, including respiratory type masks.

- [Saskatchewan's provincial website](#) indicates that wearing a mask continues to be important but also states this is an individual choice. Masks are no longer mandated in schools.
- [Nova Scotia's provincial COVID-19 guidance](#) for schools continues to require the use of masks when students and staff are indoors. There is no direction around what type of mask is recommended for children.

NP:mh