



NZSTA
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Board Support Resource

Mask-wearing policies in schools

This guide provides information for boards that are considering a mask-wearing policy for their school or kura.

You can also visit our [COVID-19 Information for Boards](#) page on our website.

How could a policy help us?

Ideally, board policy should be set at a level that lays out high expectations and collective responsibility, clearly states the intended outcomes, and whose job it is to achieve it.

In health and safety, for example, the principal is the officer charged with implementing the real day-to-day responses required to meet the board's expectation that all students and staff in the school will be kept safe as best as they reasonably can.

Do we need a mask policy?

It depends, not least because your current health and safety policy and procedures may already suffice.

One of the first steps involves undertaking a risk assessment – something your staff should conduct as a regular course of action in the school daily.

This should take into account:

- school context, e.g., size of classrooms and student numbers, location
- any traffic light setting in your region
- an awareness of case numbers in your school community, your region
- vaccination status in your community
- a knowledge of which individuals may be at higher risk from Covid-19.

Other factors for schools to consider (that sit outside of a risk assessment but within strategic board thinking) include:

- school attendance rates for students
- staff absentee levels
- ability to attract relief teachers.

When taking these considerations into account, alongside the public health recommendations from the Ministry, most schools will likely consider mask wearing a key tool for the wellbeing of their school environment right now.

The board can then ask itself:

- What else do we already have in place?
- Do we need to enforce this through a separate policy, or are our current policy and delegations doing a good job?
- If not, is it that our current health and safety policy needs amendment, or do we push forward with a separate policy and/or associated procedure?

It's up to the board to decide this.

In schools with lower staff or community support for mask-wearing, a mask policy may well be the key tool that encourages adherence and gives the principal additional support to implement a measure people are not keen on.

The board could also consider what your current governance model is:

- Through your regular board practice, how much does the board typically direct school management in their role?
- How might we mitigate any relationship niggles that could occur if we step further than we normally would into the principal's space?

This risk can be mitigated if your board culture is one where you can honestly and openly discuss the topic with your principal in the room.

Even if there is no agreement, a board meeting that has allowed all board members' voices to be heard, and consideration given to foreseeable actions and consequences, usually leads to a board decision that all board members will adhere to – regardless of personal feelings.

If they oppose the masks as a proven safety measure, what other measures can they suggest instead?

Consideration also needs to be given as to the practicality of reviewing this policy.

Assigning a delegated committee (e.g., the principal with key staff members) can make the process more manageable and less time-consuming.

How might we enforce it?

The board will need to consider their expectations on enforcement of this policy, balancing the right of our children to access quality education in a healthy and safe environment.

All of our schools and kura have experienced this challenge over the past year, in particular when the mask-wearing mandate was in place.

Revisit those measures and consider what, if anything, might need tweaking.

The information and types of questions that you as the board will be interested in, therefore, will include assurance on how you're being kept updated by your principal:

- How has your environment changed, and how has the school responded?
For example, many schools could provide online learning as an option last year, but with students now back in school, this will likely not be feasible.
- How will the school respond, and what other options might be employed for non-compliance?

Contact NZSTA

Don't hesitate to get in touch with us if you are sitting on unanswered questions as a board or if there's uneasiness between the board and the principal regarding how health and safety in Covid times are managed.

We can offer a range of support from the first call through to the 0800 number, with one of our governance or employment advisors, through to regional support for the board that can take a more long-term approach.

Advisory Support Centre 0800 782 435

For Employment matters: eradvice@nzsta.org.nz

For Governance matters: govadvice@nzsta.org.nz