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LAUSD to require students to wear non-cloth face masks starting Monday



Third grade students wear masks at Montara Avenue Elementary School. (Allen J. Schaben/Los Angeles Times)

BY MATT HAMILTON | STAFF WRITER

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Students in Los Angeles Unified School District will now be prohibited from wearing cloth masks, according to an announcement distributed Saturday by the district.

Starting Monday, students must wear “well-fitted, non-cloth masks with a nose wire” at all times, including outdoors. District officials said surgical masks or higher-grade masks were acceptable, and that such masks would be available to students upon request.

“Our in-school [coronavirus infection] rates have dropped but we are continuing to be diligent and agile in creating the safest learning environment,” said Shannon Haber, a spokesperson for LAUSD.

The shift away from cloth masks was prompted by guidance from L.A. County health authorities, Haber said.

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LAUSD does allow exemptions to mask rules for some students who have a disability, medical or mental health condition that makes them unable to comply.

“If students have mask exemptions, this does not apply to them. Otherwise, it applies to all students,” said Dr. Smita Malhotra, LAUSD’s medical director, regarding the prohibition on cloth masks.

Health officials in L.A. and across the state have increasingly urged the public to upgrade masks to surgical-grade or greater, such as N95 and KN95 masks, citing the need for tighter fitting masks with enhanced filtration to protect against the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

It’s important to “continue to wear a well-fitted mask” and “understand that masks that maybe were really helpful in the beginning are not as helpful today,” said Dr. Mark Ghaly, California’s health and human services secretary, earlier this month.

County health authorities have recommended cloth masks placed over surgical or higher-grade masks, a form of double-masking that improves fit and filtration.

Health officials have recommended masks with [the following properties](#):

- Two layers of tightly woven cotton with a third layer of nonwoven fabric. The third layer could be an inserted mask filter or a synthetic fabric, such as polypropylene.
- Nose wires to reduce gaps around the nose.
- Adjustable ear loops or straps that go around the head to reduce gaps around the face.

L.A. County Department of Public Health said Saturday that the seven-day testing positivity rate remained “very high” at 16%, with more than 250,000 positive cases this week.

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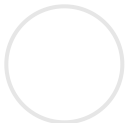


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Matt Hamilton is a reporter for the Los Angeles Times. He won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting with colleagues Harriet Ryan and Paul Pringle and was part of the team of reporters that won a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the San

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