



## State Updates School Guidance, Shifts Mask Decisions To Local Boards

Governor Roy Cooper and Health and Human Services Secretary Mandy Cohen on Wednesday released the updated StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (Toolkit) taking effect July 30<sup>th</sup> to help schools set COVID-19 safety protocols for the 2021-2022 school year. Under the key change announced at their briefing, the state will no longer have a statewide mask mandate in place for schools, and local school boards will need to decide whether to require masks and under what circumstances. The Toolkit realigns COVID prevention and mitigation strategies to indicate those that schools “SHOULD IMPLEMENT” and those they “COULD CONSIDER” as additional layers of protection. Masking indoors is listed as a strategy that should be required for all K-8 students and staff and for unvaccinated students in Grades 9-12 and their personnel.

The Toolkit has been updated to align with the CDC’s July 9<sup>th</sup> Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools and the American Academy of Pediatrics’ updated school guidance, all in an effort to ensure safe in-person learning in the new school year.

The updated [Toolkit](#) is available on the NCDHHS website, as well as a [summary](#) of the recent changes. Additionally, NCDHHS has released updated Back to School [Operational Guidance for Vaccinations](#). This guidance includes recommendations for school administrators on how to help get students (age 12 and older), teachers and other staff vaccinated. Governor Cooper and Secretary Cohen both stressed that getting more North Carolinians vaccinated is the most important thing North Carolinians can do to slow the spread of COVID-19 and keep students safely in school, where they benefit most from in-person instruction and receive other needed support like healthy meals. Governor Cooper issued this [press release](#) following the announcement on the updated guidance for K-12 schools.

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