

The COVID-19 pandemic has been hard for children with disabilities. COVID-19 has put them at higher risk for mental, physical, and academic harm. Schools are trying to keep students with disabilities safe in different ways. One way is to require mask wearing in schools.

Many children are safer in school when students and staff wear masks. However, some children with disabilities cannot wear masks. For example, a child with autism may be uncomfortable with the way a mask feels, or a child with a ventilator may not be able to put on a mask over their device.

Students with disabilities who cannot wear masks must still have access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). **Special education rules and antidiscrimination laws still apply during the pandemic.** Schools must find ways to let students with disabilities get an education like all other students, even when they cannot wear a mask.

Each student is different. Schools and families must work together to find out how to help each student get the education they need. **One way to help a student is to make a reasonable accommodation.** A reasonable accommodation is a change to the way things are usually done. **With even small changes many students with disabilities who cannot wear masks can be safe in school.**

STEPS TO GETTING A MASK ACCOMODATION

Get Proof

- Get a letter from a professional explaining why the child cannot wear a mask.
- Give this letter to the school.

Meet with the School

- Talk with the school about the student's personal situation.
- Talk about how the school can help this child and keep all other students safe too.
- Take a copy of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) guidance with you. This document has information about how to open schools safely for all students. OCR Guidance: [bit.ly/OCRGuidanceQA](https://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2020-08/20200814-ocr-guidance-on-schools-reopening.pdf).
- Make a plan to help students become comfortable wearing masks if there is not physical reason why they cannot.

Talk about options

- Some accommodations to consider:
 - Staff wear N95 masks
 - Student wears something other than a mask, like a face shield
 - Stay a safe distance from other students or in a cubicle
 - Get COVID-19 testing often
 - Share if staff and students are vaccinated
 - Have the student take safe breaks from wearing a mask during the day
 - Join class virtually
 - Get creative with other ideas to help

Write down the Plan

- Accommodations and services should be written down in the student's IEP, Health Plan, or Section 504 Plan.