



August 19, 2021

Dear Manitou Springs School District Community,

I am writing to follow up regarding the email that I sent yesterday that related to the City of Manitou Springs reinstating a mask/facial covering requirement in indoor public places. Our Leadership Team had an opportunity to meet yesterday regarding this new order. Principals will be meeting with school staff today to work as a team through the details at the school level.

I know this is a long communication, but I ask that everyone reads to the end. School principals will be able to answer school-specific questions.

Based on our experiences last year, especially balancing health protocols with a wide range of student and staff benefits, we will continue to prioritize a comprehensive approach emphasizing academic learning, social and emotional well-being, and opportunities for students and staff in a safe environment.

As with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment ([CDPHE](#)), we will continue to implement the recommended “layered approach of best practices to COVID-19 prevention.” This includes ventilation, maximization of outdoor activities, mask-wearing, vaccinations, having BINAX rapid home test kits available (as we did last year), symptom screening using the COVID Intake Form, contact tracing, cleaning and disinfecting, handwashing, and staying home when sick or exposed to COVID-19.

It is important to mention that in all of our conversations with public health that there is a distinction between recommendation, requirement, and guidance. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control states, “CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status” (August 5, 2021). As a school district, we have been highly recommending mask wearing indoors for children under 12 since last August. Under the Governor’s Executive Order (that ended last summer), mask-wearing was required for children 12 and older last school year.

As with last school year, face coverings are currently required by the federal government on school bus routes, and the district will comply with this requirement.

This letter has many different layers. As this is a complex issue, I will attempt as much as possible to communicate what this means (right now) for our school district community.

1. **Mental Health and Wellness.** We understand the impact this world event has had on students, staff, and families in regard to wellness and mental health. The constant changes and shifts have truly impacted everyone in one way or another. For example, data from [CDC](#) shows that the proportion of student emergency department visits related to mental health has increased



dramatically during the pandemic. We are fully committed to supporting the mental health and wellness needs of our students and staff. Look for further communication on our plans to address mental health needs at each school and across the school district.

2. **Manitou Springs Elementary School, Manitou Springs Middle School, and Manitou Springs High School** do fall under the required mask/facial covering order by the City. We will be requesting specific variances and clarification with the City Council regarding indoor athletics, early literacy blocks, when staff are alone, and other aspects of the school day. I will keep you all posted on these outcomes.
3. **Ute Pass Elementary School** does not fall under this mask-wearing requirement by the City of Manitou Springs due to the school not being located in Manitou Springs. However, Ute Pass Elementary School will continue to follow guidance from the Centers for Disease Control ([CDC](#)) that mask-wearing indoors is recommended. We highly recommend mask-wearing indoors.

UPE (like all schools) is continuing to work across the community to build an expectation that we all have a role in considering the medical needs and concerns of others during this pandemic was effective in the past. Therefore, we will highly recommend (but not mandate) everyone to wear a mask in our building unless they are prohibited by a medical condition or other reason. We will maintain the same level of respect and inclusivity for all families and children no matter their decision. We are confident that our community will come together, as it has for decades, with grace and understanding for each family's decision while we maintain all the recommended safety precautions recommended by public health entities.

Mask-breaks and Learning in the Outdoors?

As we did last year, teachers will be providing mask breaks for students and outdoor learning will be encouraged (when the weather permits). This is an excellent time for the body to absorb the sun's rays and for Vitamin D synthesis to occur.

When does this start?

We believe that a strong relationship with students starts on the first day of school. This is grounded in our Core Values.

1. For MSES, MSMS, and MSHS, we believe the best day to start this process is on Friday, August 20. This allows students and staff to have consistency. Teachers will have the opportunity to be creative and innovative when it comes to how they want to see the faces of students on this first day of school. This might mean that they spend more time outside building strong relationships.
2. For UPES, the highly recommended mask-wearing protocol will begin on Friday, August 20. Teachers will have the opportunity to be creative and innovative when it comes to how they want to see the faces of students on this first day of school. This might mean that they spend more time outside building strong relationships.



When does this City of Manitou Springs order end?

1. For MSES, MSMS, and MSHS, City Council has not determined when this will end. However, I can tell you that I and the Board of Education will be working closely with the City Council. City Council meetings are every Tuesday at 6:00 pm.
2. For UPES, we will continue to highly recommend mask-wearing as we did all last school year. This might change if there are any circumstances that require a different required need for mask-wearing.

What about quarantines?

According to CDPHE, fully vaccinated staff and students do not have to miss school due to quarantine. Individuals who were confirmed positive with COVID-19 in the last 90 days do not need to quarantine. Additionally, there is the opportunity for students and staff who were wearing a mask to not have to quarantine (per CDPHE).

Students and staff who live in a household with someone who has COVID-19 will need to stay at home.

Athletics & Activities

- Cameron Jones will continue to update the community on specifics related to athletics and activities.
- Manitou Springs School District will support athletics and other extracurricular programs to the full extent that the Colorado High School Activities Association (CHSAA) and state and local public health officials will allow. The close contact definition may be different for these activities.

Connect14

- Danny Tramel will continue to update the community on specifics related to after-school activities provided by Connect14.
- These classes are filling up quickly.

What about Visitors and Volunteers?

- We can't wait to have volunteers and visitors in our schools.
- Families, visitors, and volunteers will be limited in school buildings unless for authorized educational purposes and will be required to wear a facial covering or mask while inside our facilities.
- Families, visitors, and volunteers will be asked to make appointments to meet with school staff.
- Families, visitors, and volunteers attending athletic and extracurricular activities will be subject to local jurisdiction requirements (i.e. - attendees at an athletic contest held in Jefferson County will be subject to Jefferson County public health requirements, not El Paso County Health Department; requirements are based upon where the event is held).



Culture and Community

I believe it is safe to say that in way or another we have all observed circumstances (locally, nationally, internationally) where individuals or groups are in opposition or conflict during this time. Wear a mask/Don't wear a mask. Get vaccinated/Don't get vaccinated. Stay home if you are sick/Don't stay home if you are sick. While I am not advocating for or against one behavior/action/belief, what I am really hoping for is that we can come together positively, productively, and collaboratively. This is not a judgement statement. We fundamentally believe that the Manitou Springs School District 14 community can come together in a special way. After all, MSSD has been doing this for nearly 150 years. This aligns to our Core Values of:

- Relationships—Grounded in valuing others with kindness and respect.
- Deep Learning—Children and staff learning and thriving in school safely (physically, emotionally, mentally).
- Opportunity--Children and staff engaged in great opportunities that are creative, innovative, and productive, while continuing to practice resilience

While I know that this order and these circumstances are complex, we ask for your support around these processes and protocols. If there are any questions about masks and/or health protocols, please bring those questions or concerns to principals, our Health Team, or me. We are happy to answer those questions and listen to concerns.

Our goal is to have a strong start to the school year and an even stronger finish.

Very Sincerely,

Elizabeth Domangue

Links to Additional Community Resources:

[El Paso County Public Health Department](#)

[Community Test Sites for COVID-19 in El Paso County](#)