***INSTRUCTION PAGE i***



**Following is a template letter** that can be sent to your school Principal or your Board of Trustees where the school has mandated mask wearing, which is at odds with the government’s public health messaging.

This letter doesn’t relate to mask exemptions. If you have been forwarded this letter by a friend, family member or colleague then please go to <https://voicesforfreedom.co.nz/resources> to see more information regarding applying for a face covering (mask) exemption certificate, or other masks' letters more specific to your situation.

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**GUIDE TO USING THIS LETTER**

Following is a proposed template letter you may consider sending to your child's Principal and/or Board of Trustees where the school has mandated mask wearing.

**1. Current mask wearing rules at schools**

New Zealand moved to Orange Traffic Light setting on 13 April 2022 under the COVID-19 Health Response (Protection Framework and Vaccination) Amendments Order 2022. [https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2022/0089/latest/whole.html#LMS671458](https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2022/0089/latest/whole.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22LMS671458) relevant to masks, this updated the COVID-19 Health Response (Protection Framework) Order 2021 (**Orders**) [https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2021/0386/latest/whole.html#LMS599185](https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2021/0386/latest/whole.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22LMS599185).

The Orders change regularly - for the latest orders see: .<https://covid19.govt.nz/about-our-covid-19-response/legislation-and-key-documents/>

At schools in Orange, face masks are:

* **not** required on kids “but are strongly encouraged” - schools may try to introduce a requirement for wearing mask at during school - this is not the law. and therefore you can and should push back, for a justified explanation as to why the school is maintaining the rule when the government is not;
* **not** required by staff, parents, caregivers, whanau, and other visitors “but are encouraged” – again not law

[https://temahau.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-schools-and-kura/covid-19-protection-framework-school-and-kura/face-masks-schools-and-kura#face-masks-at-orange](https://temahau.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-schools-and-kura/covid-19-protection-framework-school-and-kura/face-masks-schools-and-kura%22%20%5Cl%20%22face-masks-at-orange).

Under the Order, the only time masks are required to be worn pursuant to the order is school kids aged 12 and over on school buses (Schedule 7 Part 2 of the Amendment Order). There is also a requirement for face masks to be worn on flights, in retail, public transport and in public facilities (but not swimming pools) [https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2021/0386/latest/LMS672706.html#LMS672706](https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2021/0386/latest/LMS672706.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22LMS672706).

If the school has taken the position that it requires face masks to be worn, despite the government Order not specifying it, then information in this initial section and a suggested template letter, which follows, may be useful to you. You could use it to write your own email or use the template.

**2. School to justify the requirement for masks at school at odds with the public health messaging**

Both Ministries of Health and Education say mask requirements will remain the discretion of individual schools. The use of the school’s discretion to implement a masks mandate at odds with the public health messaging and current directives needs to be justified by the school.

We have seen comments that a justification for a school to mandate masks could be due to increased number of COVID-19 cases in the community. The Ministry of Health tracks the numbers of reported cases in the community by DHB area and at the border. <https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-current-cases>

Note this same Ministry of Health data also suggests that COVID-19 infection peaked in April, when the country came out of Red setting and changed to Orange – when masks at schools were dropped.

Asking the school for actual data and what it relies on to justify a school mandate is reasonable.

**3. Your child's school has various obligations**

Principal, trustees and teachers have an important and trusted role in society and have a strong influence on learners in shaping their future. As such, each teacher is governed by the:

* Code of Professional Responsibility which sets out the high standards for ethical behaviour that are expected of every teacher <https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Code-of-Professional-Responsibility-English-one-page.pdf>
* Standards for the Teaching Profession and the expectations of effective teaching practice (respectively) <https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Our-Code-Our-Standards-Nga-Tikanga-Matatika-Nga-Paerewa.pdf>

**With respect to students, teacher's obligations to them include:**

1. promoting the wellbeing of learners and protecting them from harm
2. promoting inclusive practices to support the needs and abilities of all learners
3. being fair and effective in managing teacher's assumptions and personal beliefs

The school has health and safety obligations to its staff and students. However, where the school goes beyond what is required by the Ministry of Education, then a health and safety risk assessment and written policy has to have been created for the school to be able to justify its assessment.

**4. Exemptions**

A school’s position to maintain the use of masks does not stop the rules on exemptions.

Exemptions are self-governing.

This letter doesn’t deal with exemptions. If you have been forwarded this letter by a friend, family member or colleague then please go to <https://voicesforfreedom.co.nz/resources> to see more information regarding applying for a face covering (mask) exemption certificate, or other masks' letters more specific to your situation.

**HOW TO USE THIS LETTER?**

1. Read the letter carefully so that you understand what you are sending – this letter is **your letter**.
2. The points you need to complete or closely consider for your situation are highlighted yellow. Keep this information factual and do not hesitate to get it checked by a friend, colleague or family member.
3. This letter is only to be used in the situation where you are writing to the Principal and/or Board of Trustees at your child's school about the recent edict about masks in schools. If this letter does not apply to your situation, then go to. <https://voicesforfreedom.co.nz/resources> for other mask exemption template letters
4. Do not forget to include your email in the letter so your child's Principal knows where best to respond to you in writing.
5. Sign off the letter.
6. Print or email the letter – make sure you keep a copy. DO NOT include the first 4 instruction pages with the letter.

Your Principal or Board of Trustees may respond to this letter and if they do, then you will need to consider their response, and may need to obtain advice specific to your situation.

**YOUR CONTACT DETAILS**

**Name of Principal**

**Name of Board of Trustee Chairperson**

**Address**

**Address**

Date

FOR: The Principal AND/OR The Board of Trustees Chair AND/OR TEACHER

**School’s mask wearing rules**

**The current mask rules**

On 13 April 2022, we moved to Orange under the *COVID-19 Public Health Response (Protection Framework) Order 2021* (the **Order**). That means for students, teachers and parents masks are no longer required at school as the government has assessed that the public health response has changed.

On or about 21 July 2022, the Ministry of Education issued a strong recommendation for Term 3, that students Year 4 and above, wear masks indoors for the next four weeks of term.

This is a "recommendation" only, albeit more strongly encouraged than in Term 2[[1]](#footnote-2). This does not mean that masks are compulsory; instead it has been left to each school board to make the call themselves.

I was most surprised to get the newsletter/notice/email from the school that masks would be required to be worn, despite the government Order no longer requiring masks to be worn at school.

As the school has assessed that masks are required on the MOE’s strong recommendation, then please outline in detail the reasons for the school insisting on rules at odds with:

1. the government’s health response (i.e. it has not been mandated under government Order);
2. the fact that children are not at risk of COVID-19 (especially with Omicron, which is the current variant of concern – see Schedule B to this letter); and
3. all teachers are vaccinated and most teachers and children have now had COVID-19 anyway.

**Current advice from the relevant Ministries**

Both Ministries of Health and Education say masks are strongly encouraged but mask requirements remain at the discretion of individual schools.[[2]](#footnote-3) In using its discretion to go over and above the public health orders, any current directives need to be justifiable by the school.

There has been the suggestion that an increased number of COVID-19 cases are in the community. However, the school’s mandate does not appear to be affected by increased numbers in our relevant DHB area as per the Ministry of Health current data: <https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-current-cases> Furthermore, that same Ministry of Health current data also suggests that COVID-19 infection peaked in April 2022, when the country came out of Red setting, and changed to Orange, and mask rules were dropped at schools.

Further, the school’s mandate is at odds with a recent interview Chris Hipkins[[3]](#footnote-4) gave in which he stated *“Masks and portable air cleaners aren’t the best solutions for schools”.* He also said the best science advice is that *“classroom transmission isn’t the thing to be worried about,’’* and *“Classrooms well managed with ventilation aren’t going to be the source of the problem”* the evidence shows *“For kids sitting in a classroom doing stationary activities with ventilation, the risk isn’t as high as it is for some of those activities that go on between and after classes.’’* This is in line with what he said when the country moved to Orange: masks are not a long-term solution.

**Mask wearing, risk of transmission and dangers to children**

In addition to Mr Hipkins statements raised above, the risk of transmission needs to be considered in a highly vaccinated population, and also a population that has had a high rate of COVID-19 infection. Why teachers and students who have had COVID-19 are being subjected to further face covering mandates, when they cannot catch it or spread it again, is immunologically illogical.

In any event, for those who have not had COVID-19, the Ministry of Health has stated that *“Although children are susceptible to infection, transmission is more likely to occur between adults and from adults to children; the risk of child to child or child to adult transmission is considerably less.”*[[4]](#footnote-5) This was confirmed in a recent study that showed no significant relationship between mask mandates and case rates, an extensive study recently demonstrated.[[5]](#footnote-6) This suggests that children will be more at risk of catching COVID-19 when outside the school environment – when they are not required to wear masks! Suggesting that the school’s mandate may be futile.

Further, the government has stated throughout that children are not at risk of death or serious disease from COVID-19, that the infection is at most, mild. This has been corroborated by the New Zealand Government on numerous occasions[[6]](#footnote-7) meaning if masks have any effect at all, they are inconsequential.

Finally, the effectiveness of masks is in serious question by our own health experts. This therefore needs to be weighed against the health consequences for children. Principals, trustees and teachers have important and trusted roles in society and have a strong influence over students in shaping their future. Obligations include:

 1. promoting the wellbeing of learners and protecting them from harm

 2. promoting inclusive practices to support the needs and abilities of all learners

 3. being fair and effective in managing teacher's assumptions and personal beliefs

Significant negative health consequences have been identified in children with the wearing of masks – these cannot be ignored especially at this vital time of their development, following is a link to a number of highly respected and reviewed papers on the dangers of masking children <https://www.pandata.org/infobank-masks/>.

**Next steps**

In light of the government data, comments from our own Minister of Education on masking kids, and the significant number of risks in masking children, I ask the school to reconsider its mandate.

If the school is not prepared to drop its mandate, then within 2 business days, please provide the information the school relies upon to justify a masks mandate which it as odds with the government’s public health advice, including the health and safety risk assessment the school has conducted to substantiate the mask mandate it has implemented.

Yours sincerely,

[name/signature] and Email: [insert e-mail address]

1. [https://bulletins.education.govt.nz/bulletin/he-pitopito-korero/issue/update-21-july-2022/date/2022-07-21#masking-up-for-term-3:-managing-winter-illnesses-and-covid-19](https://bulletins.education.govt.nz/bulletin/he-pitopito-korero/issue/update-21-july-2022/date/2022-07-21%22%20%5Cl%20%22masking-up-for-term-3%3A-managing-winter-illnesses-and-covid-19) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [https://bulletins.education.govt.nz/bulletin/he-pitopito-korero/issue/update-21-july-2022/date/2022-07-21#masking-up-for-term-3:-managing-winter-illnesses-and-covid-19](https://bulletins.education.govt.nz/bulletin/he-pitopito-korero/issue/update-21-july-2022/date/2022-07-21%22%20%5Cl%20%22masking-up-for-term-3%3A-managing-winter-illnesses-and-covid-19) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/the-debate-that-does-chris-hipkins-head-in> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/immunisation-handbook-2020/5-coronavirus-disease-covid-19 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4118566> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/get-the-facts-about-covid-19-vaccination/covid-19-vaccination-and-children/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)