

Pencils, books, masks

Written by Staff Reports
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Dress code for the first day of school

Beginning Aug. 20 there is a new mask mandate in place in New Mexico.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham made the announcement on Aug. 17 in a Zoom press conference.

Due to the spread of the Delta variant everyone two years old and older is directed to wear a

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mask or multi-layer cloth face covering in all indoor public settings, except when a healthcare provider instructs otherwise or when the individual is eating or drinking.

The news came the afternoon before the first day of school in Gallup-McKinley County.

District superintendent Mike Hyatt told the *Sun* that the changes would not be difficult to implement.

“We will make adjustments to comply with the governor’s health order,” he said.

Private educational institutions serving children and young adults from pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade, including home schools serving children who are not household members, will be required to adhere to the face covering and other COVID-Safe Practices requirements for in-person instruction that can be found in the state’s “Reentry Guidance” for the Public Education Department and the “COVID-Response Toolkit for New Mexico’s Public Schools” which can be viewed at <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/reentry-district-and-school-guidance/>.

Private educational institutions shall follow the reporting, testing, and closure requirements set forth in the COVID Response Toolkit for the state’s public schools.

On the Gallup-McKinley County Schools District website, the New Mexico Public Education Department’s Updated Guidance for School Year 21-22 as of Aug. 18 states:

“All PK-12 schools are shifting to a universal mask mandate, regardless of individual vaccination statutes. Everyone in a school building, at an indoor school activity, or on school transportation is required to wear a mask, except at times dedicated to eating and drinking.

Additionally, students are not required to wear masks while taking resting/sleeping breaks; students must maintain social distance and be supervised by staff while resting. Everyone is required to wear masks for indoor recess, for physical education classes, and for indoor athletic

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practices and competitions.

Masks are recommended, but not required while outdoors, except for staff (and their students) with close contact assignments.

When county transmission rates are substantial or high (i.e., when either percentage positive tests are eight percent or higher or the daily case rate is 7.14 cases per day per 100,000 population or higher), everyone is required to wear masks inside school buildings, even when no student services are being provided.”

SCHOOL WORKERS

The state has outlined a new vaccinate-or-test policy for workers in New Mexico schools.

All school workers in public, private or charter schools who are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or who are unwilling to provide proof of vaccination to their respective supervisors must, effective Aug. 23, provide proof of a COVID-19 test on a weekly basis.

Gov. Lujan Grisham implemented an identical policy for state government employees through the State Personnel Office earlier this month.

“Our priority is keeping students and staff safe and learning in school buildings,” Public Education Secretary-Designate Kurt Steinhaus said. “We know from experience that in-person learning is the gold standard.

“Masks are part of that safety strategy, but vaccinations are the best tool, hands down, he said. “Because of increasing infections in schools due to the Delta variant, we need to work together to step up our game and focus on COVID safety measures that can keep our schools open for learning.”

COVID-19 REGULATIONS

OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

Under the NMSA 1978 Section 12-10A-19 public health order issued Aug. 17 by Lujan Grisham, any business, establishment or non-profit (other than healthcare operations, utilities, or indigent care services) regularly visited by members of the public must report to the New Mexico Environment Department, and will monitor and report when they have four or more rapid responses within a 14-day period.

Rapid responses will be counted on a rolling basis.

However, unlike previous COVID-19 regulations, four or more rapid responses will not mean businesses, establishments or non-profits will have to cease operations.

Any and all state officials authorized by the Department of Health will be allowed to enforce this latest public health order by issuing a citation of violation, which can result in civil administrative penalties of up to \$5,000 for each violation.

The New Mexico Department of Health, the New Mexico Department of Public Safety, the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, and all other state departments and agencies are authorized to take all appropriate steps to ensure compliance with the the New Mexico public health order issued Aug. 18.