

If children in a school are socially distanced and in seats, can they remove their face coverings?

On August 12, Governor Bullock extended the July 15 Directive requiring face masks in certain indoor and outdoor settings to include public and private k-12 schools. The August 12 Directive requires students and staff to wear face coverings in all areas of the school. ***While children are encouraged to wear masks at all times, schools may allow children to remove their masks if they are seated and socially distanced in a classroom.*** This is a narrow allowance. Social distancing is defined as having 6 feet of spacing from any other person-in other words, ***this flexibility is permissible only where such spacing is strictly observed.*** Doing so may require reduced classroom capacity. ***The flexibility described here applies only to classrooms where social distancing can occur and when children are seated at their desks. If a teacher is working one on one with a student, both teacher and student must wear a mask. If students are working in small groups, they must be wearing masks. The flexibility described here is only available where county health departments have not instituted more stringent requirements.*** Local officials and individual school districts may impose more restrictive requirements as they deem appropriate for local circumstances. Here is the relevant language, reproduced in both the July 15 and August 12 Directives: "In the interest of uniformity of laws and to prevent the spread of disease, all inconsistent local government health ordinances or orders are preempted by this Directive, but only to the extent they are less restrictive. Counties, cities, and towns may adopt more restrictive ordinances."