

## Recommendation regarding Mask Exemptions

Northern currently has a requirement for students to wear cloth face masks on campus in all indoor public spaces. To clarify, this includes classrooms, lecture halls, laboratories, the library, hallways, the public space in residence halls, etc. but does not include the student's personal living spaces, such as residence hall apartments, suites, and rooms.

### The Recommendation:

**If any student wishes to** be exempt from the requirement to wear a cloth face mask in public spaces they can apply for an accommodation to be allowed to wear a Plexiglas face shield instead. Medical documentation will be required and the process will mirror the ADA accommodation process.

Most students will not medically qualify to be exempt from any face covering in public spaces, but Northern will accept and consider applications for a "no face covering" accommodation. Specific medical support would be necessary before this would be approved.

Any student who wishes to be instructed exclusively by remote learning outside of our already established on-line classes also be required to submit medical documentation and follow the standard process for ADA accommodations. Some classes will not be able to accommodate complete remote learning because students must participate in some hands-on or face-to-face exercises to complete the course objectives. Disability Services is both compiling a list of these classes and has added language to the Accommodation Letter to Students to acknowledge this.

In developing this recommendation, Harger Boal (Disability Services) and Renee Sheen (Human Resources), compared the student and human resources ADA accommodations and recommended that this established process be used to review any requests by students to receive an accommodation from wearing cloth face masks or to qualify to be allowed to participate in remote learning. They agree that students granted an accommodation for education will still have to work with HR separately for a workplace accommodation. Communication to students will indicate how to start this process (in short – they contact Disability Services or Human Resources).

This recommendation includes a specific set of suggested instructions for faculty to follow if a student does not wear a mask in a learning space.

Harger Boal, Disability Services Coordinator, has provided the following suggestion of language that can be inserted in faculty syllabi:

*Mask Accommodation ADA Statement: Certain students may qualify for alternative face covering accommodations due to a variety of health conditions. These students have gone through a qualifying process with the Office of Disability Services. Faculty have been notified of which students receive these accommodations in their class and will handle all mask related issues and concerns. If you have concerns regarding this topic please contact the faculty member outside of class. Please do not question or confront fellow students in the classroom who are using alternative or modified face coverings.*

### Additional Details:

- Students will file a formal request for accommodation (to be allowed to wear a plexiglass face shield rather than a cloth facemask) through the Disability Services office using the app; request

for accommodation is a well-established process. The request will not be granted unless medical documentation is submitted and accepted.

- Formal request for accommodation to be exempt from face-to-face learning (to be allowed to use zoom or other substitute work rather than being present in the classroom) will also flow through the Disability Services office and medical documentation will be required.
- In the event that a person applies for an exemption from any face covering AND requests face-to-face learning, additional and specific medical documentation may be required before the exemption is granted. Northern does not anticipate many of these situation since it is unlikely that a person who cannot medically tolerate a face mask or shield will also risk face-to-face learning.
- Mobility accommodation (going to the front of long queues caused by COVID processes) will be processed through Disability Services. Harger Boal will modify existing business-sized cards to evidence that the exemption has been granted.
- Northern is using the ADA app to make some of the communication automated. Specifically, we will update two common rosters used by faculty with an icon or indicator to show a mask or remote learning accommodation. We will send either a specific email or a copy of the acceptance letter for the accommodation to each faculty (for classes registered at the time the accommodation is granted). We will also send a “heads up” email to faculty when students apply for a remote learning accommodation.
- We acknowledge that remote learning accommodations require additional work by faculty. We will give them as much lead time and information about the accommodation as we can.
- We will work with the NMU Logistics Team to communicate to faculty, staff, and students both the requirement for masks and the process for exemption.

### **Disability Services Coordinator’s Mask Modification Accommodation Procedure**

Students will go through the traditional process to request, qualify and receive a mask modification accommodation.

1. The student needs to submit documentation of a disability impacting their ability to wear a face mask to the Office of Disability Services. This documentation may be from a physician (psychiatrist, family practitioner, neurologist, pediatrician) or psychologist. Preferred documentation should address how a mask would impact a student’s health, inhibit the student’s learning or state that a face mask accommodation is necessary.
2. The student needs to meet with the Coordinator of Disability Services in person, via phone or Zoom. This meeting will serve as a collaborative exchange to find a reasonable accommodation for their needs.
3. Lastly, the student will submit a formal Accommodation Request Form indicating they need a mask modification accommodation. Qualifying students will receive a Letter of Accommodation to share with faculty regarding their mask modification. Qualifying students will also receive a mask modification identification card as proof of their accommodation in campus venues. The

student's status of "mask modification" will appear on an EduCat roster while keeping the disability completely confidential.

4. The student will need to resubmit an Accommodation Request each semester they require this accommodation. The student will receive an updated Letter of Accommodation for each semester they request along with an identification card and an updated roster status.

*\*For students who require a "mask exemption" and do not choose the "Remote Learning" accommodation option more detailed documentation may be required. The documentation must explicitly address how a face mask and a face shield would impact a student's health or inhibit the student's learning and state that a face mask exemption is necessary. The documentation needs to address the need for a face shield or face mask in transit between classes and in common areas. The Coordinator of Disability Services will send a follow-up email outlining what documentation criteria needs to be met and how to proceed until documentation is obtained. If there is lag time between the request and obtaining additional documentation, the student will wear a face shield or attend class remotely. Once approved for a mask exemption, during class the student will either socially distance at a faculty-approved location in the classroom or sit in a faculty-approved partitioned Plexiglas area. The Coordinator of Disability Services will provide a continually updated list to facilities of which rooms need a Plexiglas partition.*

Options for mask modification include an alternative type of face-covering, a face-shield, intermittent breaks from class, or opting for remote learning.

Possible disabilities that could warrant a mask modification accommodation include but are not limited to:

1. Autism
2. OCD
3. Generalized Anxiety Disorder
4. Major Depressive Disorder
5. PTSD
6. Claustrophobia
7. Schizophrenia
8. Hearing Impairment
9. Speech Impairment
10. Mobility of hands/arms
11. Asthma/Chronic lung disease
12. Other rare psychological illness

#### **FOR FACULTY: Students arriving to class with no face covering**

Before classes begin, check your email and rosters for indication that a student in your class has been granted a medical exception to either wear a face shield (rather than a cloth face mask) or no mask at all. Either accommodation will be rare and require medical documentation. Note that a no-face-covering accommodation is expected to be EXTREMELY rare and would only be granted with specific medical

documentation. The process to notify faculty of accommodation is partially automated but we expect that there could be a delay if a student changes or adds classes after receiving an accommodation.

Regarding alternate face coverings: Students granted an exemption from wearing a cloth face mask will most likely still be wearing a Plexiglas face shield. If an accommodated student is wearing a face shield as an accommodation, you do not necessarily need to say anything. However, if you wish, direct the class to the syllabus language about mask accommodation.

**If someone arrives in class with no face covering (and you did not receive notification from Disability Services about an accommodation):**

- Announce that masks are required on campus by Official University Requirement and a State of Michigan Executive Order.
- Direct them to the free masks in the building or have a free disposable mask available in your classroom.
- If the student does not put on a mask, you can ask the student for the official accommodation letter or business-sized card issued by the Disability Services office. Alternately, they can show you the electronic version of the letter in their @nmu.edu email. You cannot ask for or announce a medical diagnosis.
- If they still do not put on a mask, ask them to leave.
- If they do not leave, you are empowered to dismiss class and contact the Dean of Students office. Include student's name and a brief summary of what occurred so that the DOS can reach out to the student to discuss the violation of the Student Code.
- Alternately, contact the NMU Police Department at 227-2151 to remove the student from class. NMU PD will escort the student from the class and contact the Dean of Students Office for conduct discussion.

What will happen: If an officer arrives in time to talk to the student, it is the officer's choice whether to walk the student to the DOS office or file an official report. If an official report is filed, a copy is sent to the student and the student has 48 hours to respond. The DOS will track noncompliance. The first response will be to explain the Official University Request (which includes the expectations of student behavior during the pandemic) and try to persuade the student to wear masks in class. Repeated noncompliance or egregious behavior will result in more severe consequences, include the possibility of temporary suspension.