



February 22, 2021
Client Alert

PIAA POSTSEASON COVID-19 UNIVERSAL FACE COVERING CERTIFICATION

On Wednesday, February 17, 2021, the PIAA adopted the attached certification form requiring postseason participants to certify in writing that individual athletes qualify for the medical exemption under Section 3 of the Department of Health's universal face covering mandate. PIAA's mandatory form, called "PIAA Postseason COVID-19 Universal Face Covering Certification," requires either principals or athletic directors to certify that a team member qualifies for an individual medical exemption, specific to their individual health condition, in order to be exempt from wearing a mask during any postseason competition. Only athletes that have been listed and certified as medically exempt, via this form, are permitted to compete without a mask.

As written, PIAA's certification form applies to all sports (with the exception of swimming), and only to state tournament, or inter-district, competition in winter sports. It does not include district playoffs, although district committees may have their own policies.

The certification form further states that athletes are providing permission to participate in competitions against athletes who are exempted from wearing face coverings, by virtue of playing in the tournament. Lastly, the certification form makes it clear that a student or team that qualifies for inter-district tournaments must be willing to compete against opponents who are not masked, as a result of qualifying for a school-certified exemption, or forfeit.

Not surprisingly, PIAA's certification form has created debate as to whether it complies with the Department of Health's Order and associated guidance regarding Section 3 exemptions. Principals and athletic directors that may execute the certification form should proceed carefully as they will be individually certifying that individual athletes qualify for a medical exemption during active participation/competition. Principals and athletic directors are strongly encouraged to confirm the status of exemptions before submitting PIAA's certification form. It is important to remember that school district attestation forms are also directly tied to compliance with the Department of Health's masking Order, and the certification form could later be used to demonstrate noncompliance.

As with all other Client Alerts, these guidelines/recommendations are subject to change on a daily or weekly basis depending on Orders from Governor Wolf, the Pennsylvania Department of Education or Pennsylvania Secretary of Health.

While the Beard Legal Group Client Alert is designed to provide information on topics of concern to Pennsylvania Public Schools, it is not legal advice and school districts should contact their Solicitor, Labor of Special Counsel for advice related to their specific circumstances.

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(to be completed prior to the tournament and submitted with the entry form, as applicable. A copy should also be kept on site by the head coach)

GENERAL RULE: The following FAQ is set forth in the Updated Order of the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Requiring Universal Face Coverings.

Does the Order apply to athletes and sports activities? Yes. Everyone who participates in sports activities including coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders) and spectators must wear a face covering, such as a mask, unless they fall under an exception in Section 3 of the Order.

Indoors: Coaches, athletes (including cheerleaders), and spectators must wear face coverings, when indoors and where another person or persons who are not members of the individual's household are present in the same space, irrespective of physical distance. This includes while actively engaged in workouts, competition, and on the sidelines, etc.

This masking requirement is mandatory. For that reason, for the PIAA Inter-District Championship Tournament in all sports, PIAA requires all persons affiliated with a team, including those actively participating in a contest (other than swimming) to wear a mask at all times while at a Contest venue. The only exception permitted is for those persons during competition and falling "under an exception in Section 3 of the Order." PIAA will accept a certification from either the Principal or Athletic Director of a school that the school has made a determination that a student qualifies for an exception for participation DURING a Contest. No exception will be accepted for any person while not actually participating in a Contest. Masks must be worn on the sidelines at all times. If a school has determined that an exception is merited for a participant, the following certification must be completed:

CERTIFICATION: I hereby certify that each of the following players qualify for an individual medical exemption, specific to their individual health condition, from wearing a mask during a Contest as per Section 3 in the Updated Order of the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Requiring Universal Face Coverings. In particular, I certify that wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a health condition or a disability for the following student(s):

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

NOTE: Any student and team entering the PIAA Inter-District Championship Tournament consents to participate against students who have been granted an exception certified to through completion of this form by the student's school. A student or team choosing not to participate against any opponent will be required to forfeit that contest. In the sport of wrestling, such forfeiture eliminates the student from further competition in that tournament (see Rule 10-2-5 of the NFHS Wrestling Rules Book).

Name: _____ Date: _____

Position (check): Principal Athletic Director