

Face coverings in schools – From 8th March 2021:

Coronavirus (COVID-19) usually spreads by droplets from coughs, sneezes and speaking. These droplets can also be picked up from surfaces, if you touch a surface and then your face without washing your hands first. This is why social distancing, regular hand hygiene, and covering coughs and sneezes is so important in controlling the spread of the virus.

The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering may reduce the spread of coronavirus droplets in certain circumstances, helping to protect others.

In the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, a face covering is something which safely covers the nose and mouth. You can buy reusable or single-use face coverings.

Recent studies suggests that not all face coverings are equally effective at preventing the spread of Covid-19.

In experiments, bandanas, handkerchiefs, fleece balaclavas and neck gaiters offered very little protection, while N95 respirators, surgical masks and even homemade cloth masks performed better.

Further studies suggest the use of bandanas is the least effective form of face mask. As such bandanas, balaclavas and neck gaiters (snoods) should not be used in school.

Face coverings are not classified as PPE (personal protective equipment) which is used in a limited number of settings to protect wearers against hazards and risks, such as surgical masks or respirators used in medical and industrial settings.

Secondary school:

Pupils: Year 7 and above are to correctly wear a face covering when moving around the school. This is not required when outdoors.

Year 7 and above to also wear face coverings in the classroom unless social distancing can be strictly maintained.

All staff: As above

Primary School:

Pupils: not to wear face coverings

All staff: to wear a face covering when moving around the school where social distancing (2 metres) between adults is not possible.

Schools will maintain a restricted supply of face coverings if required.

The previously advised exemptions still apply:

- people who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability
- where putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause severe distress
- if you are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate

If an individual has an age, health or disability reason for not wearing a face covering:

- they do not routinely need to show any written evidence of this
- they do not need show an exemption card

This means an individual does not need to seek advice or request a letter from a medical professional about the reason for not wearing a face covering.

However, some people may feel more comfortable showing something that says they do not have to wear a face covering. This could be in the form of an exemption card, badge or even a home-made sign.

Carrying an exemption card or badge is a personal choice and is not required by law but should be encouraged to [prevent multiple challenges from peers and/ or staff.

A face visor or shield may be worn in addition to a face covering but not instead of one. This is because face visors or shields do not adequately cover the nose and mouth.

Pupils will be made aware that they must not touch the front of the covering during use or removal.

How to wear a face covering: A face covering should:

- cover your nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably
- fit comfortably but securely against the side of the face
- be secured to the head with ties or ear loops
- be made of a material that you find to be comfortable and breathable, such as cotton
- ideally include at least 2 layers of fabric (the World Health Organization recommends 3, depending on the fabric used)
- unless disposable, it should be able to be washed with other items of laundry according to fabric washing instructions and dried without causing the face covering to be damaged

When wearing a face covering you should:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on

- avoid wearing on your neck or forehead
- avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could be contaminated with the virus
- change the face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it
- avoid taking it off and putting it back on a lot in quick succession (for example, when leaving and entering shops on a high street)

When removing a face covering:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing
- only handle the straps, ties or clips
- do not give it to someone else to use
- if single-use, dispose of it carefully in a residual waste bin and do not recycle
- if reusable, wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed
- Do not touch the front of the face covering, or the part of the face covering that has been in contact with your mouth and nose.
- Once removed, store reusable face coverings in a plastic bag until you have an opportunity to wash them. If the face covering is single use, dispose of it in a residual waste bin. Do not put them in a recycling bin.
- Make sure you clean any surfaces the face covering has touched using normal household cleaning products. If eating in a cafe, for example, it is important that you do not place the face covering on the table.
- Wash your face covering regularly and follow the washing instructions for the fabric. You can use your normal detergent. You can wash and dry it with other laundry. You must throw away your face covering if it is damaged.

The government has also published guidance on the safe disposal of waste for the public and businesses:

To dispose of any face coverings or PPE you or members of your household use when self-isolating, you should:

- double bag them
- store them for 72 hours before putting them in a 'black bag' waste bin

Do not put them in a recycling bin.