



Department  
for Education

# Face coverings in education

March 2021

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## Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It is intended to support schools and further education (FE) institutions with new advice on the use of face coverings.

## Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- schools, including special schools
- alternative provision
- 16 to 19 academies
- FE settings including general FE colleges, sixth-form colleges and other providers

## Main changes to previous guidance

This guidance has been updated to include new guidance on face coverings to support schools and colleges to return to a full attendance on 8 March.

## Introduction

From 8 March 2021, new advice applies to the use of face coverings by staff, pupils and students in schools and further education in England. Further information can be found in the [guidance for schools](#), [guidance for specialist settings](#) and [guidance for further education](#). There is separate [guidance for early years and childcare providers](#) and [guidance for higher education](#).

All schools and colleges will open fully this March. Returning to school and college is vital for pupils and students' education and wellbeing.

We know that the predominant new variant of coronavirus (COVID-19) is more transmissible; however, Public Health England (PHE) advice remains that the way to control this virus is with the system of controls, even with the current new variants. We are further strengthening these measures to provide more reassurance and to help decrease the disruption the virus causes to education.

Implementing the system of controls creates a safer environment for staff, pupils and students where the risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection is substantially reduced. The use of face coverings in recommended circumstances is one element of the system of controls and must be implemented in line with other guidance.

This is a temporary measure and will be reviewed at Easter, in partnership with health experts, to decide whether evidence suggests that these measures can be eased ahead of the summer term.

This is guidance, not mandatory activity, and any legal exemptions that apply to the wearing of face coverings in shops and on public transport also apply to this advice.

Where something is essential for public health reasons, as advised by Public Health England (PHE), we have said 'must'. Where there is a legal requirement we have made that clear. This guidance does not create any new legal obligations.

## What a face covering is

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. You may also use a scarf, bandana, religious garment or hand-made cloth covering but these must securely fit round the side of the face.

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.

Face coverings are instead largely intended to protect others, not the wearer, against the spread of infection because they cover the nose and mouth, which are the main confirmed sources of transmission of virus that causes coronavirus infection (COVID-19).

Further information can be found in the [guidance on face coverings: when to wear one, exemptions, and how to make your own.](#)

## **When to wear a face covering in education**

The [World Health Organisation published a statement on 21 August 2020 about children and face coverings](#). They advise that “children aged 12 and over should wear a face covering under the same conditions as adults, in particular when they cannot guarantee at least a 1-metre distance from others and there is widespread transmission in the area.”

Where pupils and students in year 7 and above are educated, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff, pupils and students when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained. Face coverings do not need to be worn by pupils and students when outdoors on the premises.

In addition, we now also recommend that in those settings where pupils and students in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn in classrooms and during activities unless social distancing can be maintained. This does not apply in situations where wearing a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity, for example in PE lessons.

In primary schools, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and adult visitors in situations where social distancing between adults is not possible (for example, when moving around in corridors and communal areas). Children in primary school do not need to wear a face covering.

We are recommending these additional precautionary measures for a limited time during this period of high coronavirus (COVID-19) prevalence in the community. These measures will be in place until Easter. As with all measures, we will keep this under review and update guidance at that point.

Transparent face coverings, which may assist communication with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate, can also be worn. There is currently very limited evidence regarding the effectiveness or safety of transparent face coverings, but they may be effective in reducing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Face visors or shields should not be worn as an alternative to face coverings. They may protect against droplet spread in specific circumstances but are unlikely to be effective in preventing aerosol transmission when used without an additional face covering. They should only be used after carrying out a risk assessment for the specific situation and should always be cleaned appropriately.

Those who rely on visual signals for communication, or communicate with or provide support to such individuals, are currently exempt from any requirement to wear face coverings in education settings or in public places.

## **Safe wearing and removal of face coverings**

It is vital that face coverings are worn correctly and that clear instructions are provided to staff, pupils and students on [how to put on, remove, store and dispose of face coverings](#) in all of the circumstances above, to avoid inadvertently increasing the risks of transmission. Safe wearing of face coverings requires the:

- cleaning of hands before and after touching – including to remove or put them on
- safe storage of them in individual, sealable plastic bags between use.

Where a face covering becomes damp, it should not be worn, and the face covering should be replaced carefully. Staff, pupils and students may consider bringing a spare face covering to wear in the event that their face covering becomes damp during the day.

You must instruct pupils and students to:

- not touch the front of their face covering during use or when removing it

- dispose of temporary face coverings in a 'black bag' waste bin (not recycling bin)
- place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag they can take home with them
- wash their hands again before heading to their classroom

## Access to face coverings

It is reasonable to assume that staff, pupils and students will now have access to face coverings due to their increasing use in wider society. Public Health England has made available resources on how to [make a simple face covering](#).

Settings should have a small contingency supply available for people who:

- are struggling to access a face covering
- are unable to use their face covering as it has become damp, soiled or unsafe
- have forgotten their face covering

No pupil or student should be denied education on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering.

## Exemptions

Some individuals are [exempt from wearing face coverings](#). This applies to individuals who:

- cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical impairment or disability, illness or mental health difficulties
- speak to or provide help to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate

The same exemptions should be applied in education settings, and we would expect teachers and other staff to be sensitive to those needs, noting that some people are less able to wear face coverings and that the reasons for this may not be visible to others.



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