

Face Coverings

St Nicholas Owen Catholic MAC continue to follow government guidance and consider the advice of the World Health Organisation, Local Authorities and Public Health England.

As schools are preparing for the return of all pupils in the autumn term it is a legal requirement that we should revisit and update our risk assessments (building on the learning to date and the practices already developed) to consider the additional risks and control measures to enable a return to full capacity.

The Government announced on the 25th August 2020 the expectation that staff and pupils can wear face coverings if social distancing cannot be guaranteed. The World Health Organisation published a statement on 21 August about children and face coverings. They now advise that “children aged 12 and over should wear a mask 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.”

Nationwide, the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary in education settings generally because a system of control, applicable to all education environments, provides additional mitigating measures. Schools and colleges will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas where social distancing cannot be safely managed, if they believe that it is right in their particular circumstances.

Consistent with WHO's new advice, schools and colleges should take additional precautionary measures in areas where the transmission of the virus is high. These areas are defined as areas of national government intervention.

In these local intervention (lockdown) areas, in education settings where Year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

What is a face covering?

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).

The reason for using face coverings

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.

Because face coverings are mainly intended to protect others, not the wearer, from coronavirus (COVID-19) they are not a replacement for social distancing and regular hand washing. It is important to follow all the other government advice on coronavirus (COVID-19) including staying safe outside your home. If you have recent onset of any of the most important symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19):

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of smell or taste (anosmia)
- you and your household must isolate at home: wearing a face covering does not change this. You should arrange to have a test to see if you have COVID-19.

Wearing a face covering

It is vital that face coverings are worn correctly and that clear instructions are provided to staff and pupils 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 cleaning of hands before and after touching – including to remove or put them on – and the 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.

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 two layers of fabric (the World Health Organisation recommends three 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 (you do not have to double bag, it can be disposed in your general waste bag) (if you have symptoms and are self-isolating do not dispose in general waste, follow guidance on disposing of waste and double bag)
- 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

Face covering in classrooms

On the basis of current evidence, in light of the mitigating measures education settings are taking, and the negative impact on communication, face coverings will not generally be necessary in the classroom even where social distancing is not possible. There is greater use of the system of controls for minimising risk, including through keeping in small and consistent groups or bubbles, and greater scope for physical distancing by staff within classrooms. Face coverings can have a negative impact on learning and teaching and so their use in the classroom should be avoided.

Access to Face coverings

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

However, where anybody is struggling to access a face covering, or where they are unable to use their face covering due to having forgotten it or it having become soiled or unsafe, education settings should take steps to have a small contingency supply available to meet such needs.

No-one should be excluded from education on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering.

Exemptions

Some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings. For example, people who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability,

or if you are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate. The same exemptions will apply in education settings, and we would expect teachers and other staff to be sensitive to those needs.

Exemption cards

Those who have an age, health or disability reason for not wearing a face covering should not be routinely asked to give any written evidence of this, this includes exemption cards. No person needs to seek advice or request a letter from a medical professional about their reason for not wearing a face covering.

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.

This is a personal choice and is not necessary in law.

Face Coverings at work

It is important to note that coronavirus (COVID-19) needs to be managed through a hierarchy or system of control including social distancing, high standards of hand hygiene, increased surface cleaning, fixed teams or partnering, and other measures such as using screens or barriers to separate people from each other.

These measures remain the best ways of managing risk in the workplace, but there are some circumstances when wearing a face covering may be marginally beneficial and a precautionary measure; this will largely be to protect others and not the wearer. If employees choose to wear a face covering, normal policies relating to occupational work wear and PPE will continue to apply.

St Nicholas Owen Catholic MAC position on face coverings at school is as follows:

When the transmission rate is low, as defined by the relevant Local Public Health, the following applies:

- Pupils may choose to wear a face covering when moving between lessons.
- Staff may choose to wear a face covering in lessons or while moving in communal areas.

We recognise the government's position that masks in lessons may be detrimental to learning, and where that is a risk, teachers will make every effort to mitigate against it.

When the transmission rate is high, as defined by the relevant Local Public Health, the following applies:

- Pupils must wear a face covering when moving between lessons. Use of a mask in a lesson by a pupil should be in response to a specific medical condition
- Staff must wear a face covering while moving in communal areas.
- Staff may choose to wear a face covering in lessons.

This face covering chosen by the member of staff should be consistent with current WHO advice³ as follows:

- *adults under the age of 60 and who are in general good health should wear **fabric masks** when they cannot guarantee at least a 1-metre distance from others. This is particularly important for adults working with children who may have close contact with children and one another.*

- *Adults aged 60 or over, or who have any underlying health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or lung cancer, should wear a **medical mask** because of their higher risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19. (Note: a medical mask is a disposable surgical mask)*
- The WHO do not mention face shields. Staff may choose to wear a face shield, but should be aware that there is not strong evidence that a face shield alone would prevent inhalation of aerosol particles and protect as effectively as a mask. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention⁴ does not recommend face shields for normal everyday activities or as a substitute for masks, since there is insufficient evidence to support their effectiveness. The Swiss health authorities⁵ have also warned against using face visors instead of masks after an investigation into an outbreak of Covid-19 at a hotel in the canton of Graubünden revealed all those who were infected had been wearing plastic face shields, while those who avoided infection were in masks.
- Face shields primarily protect the wearer from infection via their eyes. They may be useful to prevent respiratory droplets from the wearer reaching people nearby, but the evidence for this is not conclusive.

Help choosing who wears what:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esM_ePHn0aw#action=share

Further guidance can be found on the following websites.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education/face-coverings-in-education>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-disposing-of-waste>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-restrictions-areas-with-an-outbreak-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-children-and-masks-related-to-covid-19>

HOW TO WEAR A NON-MEDICAL FABRIC MASK SAFELY

[who.int/epi-win](https://www.who.int/epi-win)

Do's →



Clean your hands before touching the mask



Inspect the mask for damage or if dirty



Adjust the mask to your face without leaving gaps on the sides



Cover your mouth, nose, and chin



Avoid touching the mask



Clean your hands before removing the mask



Remove the mask by the straps behind the ears or head



Pull the mask away from your face



Store the mask in a clean plastic, resealable bag if it is not dirty or wet and you plan to re-use it



Remove the mask by the straps when taking it out of the bag



Wash the mask in soap or detergent, preferably with hot water, at least once a day



Clean your hands after removing the mask

Don'ts →



Do not use a mask that looks damaged



Do not wear a loose mask



Do not wear the mask under the nose



Do not remove the mask where there are people within 1 metre



Do not use a mask that is difficult to breathe through



Do not wear a dirty or wet mask



Do not share your mask with others

A fabric mask can protect others around you. To protect yourself and prevent the spread of COVID-19, remember to keep at least 1 metre distance from others, clean your hands frequently and thoroughly, and avoid touching your face and mask.



World Health Organization

HOW TO WEAR A MEDICAL MASK SAFELY

who.int/epi-win

Do's →



Wash your hands before touching the mask



Inspect the mask for tears or holes



Find the top side, where the metal piece or stiff edge is



Ensure the colored-side faces outwards



Place the metal piece or stiff edge over your nose



Cover your mouth, nose, and chin



Adjust the mask to your face without leaving gaps on the sides



Avoid touching the mask



Remove the mask from behind the ears or head



Keep the mask away from you and surfaces while removing it



Discard the mask immediately after use preferably into a closed bin



Wash your hands after discarding the mask

Don'ts →



Do not use a ripped or damp mask



Do not wear the mask only over mouth or nose



Do not wear a loose mask



Do not touch the front of the mask



Do not remove the mask to talk to someone or do other things that would require touching the mask



Do not leave your used mask within the reach of others



Do not re-use the mask

Remember that masks alone cannot protect you from COVID-19. Maintain at least 1 metre distance from others and wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, even while wearing a mask.

EPI·WIN

World Health Organization