



Department  
for Education

# Face coverings in education

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# Contents

Summary	3
Who is this publication for?	3
Main changes to previous guidance	3
Introduction	4
What a face covering is	4
When to wear a face covering in education	5
Safe wearing and removal of face coverings	6
Access to face coverings	7
Exemptions	7

## Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It is intended to support schools and further education (FE) providers 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 providers including general FE colleges, sixth-form colleges, special post-16 institutions, designated institutions, adult community learning providers and independent training providers

## Main changes to previous guidance

We have made specific changes to the information on face coverings.

## Introduction

From 8 March 2021, new advice applied 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 FE providers opened 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 further strengthened 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 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.”

In schools and colleges where pupils and students in year 7 and above are educated, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by pupils when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

In addition, we also recommend in those schools and FE providers, that face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils in classrooms or 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. Face coverings do not need to be worn by pupils when outdoors on the premises.

Subject to the roadmap process, as part of step 3, we expect these precautionary measures to no longer be recommended. This would be no earlier than 17 May and will be confirmed with one week’s notice.

In secondary schools and FE providers, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and adults (including visitors) in situations where social distancing is not possible (for example, when moving around in corridors and communal areas).

In primary schools and early years settings, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and adults (including 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 and early years settings should not wear face coverings.

If your education setting operates commercial training environments such as hairdressing, barbering and beauty salons, sports and fitness facilities or restaurants, they must comply with relevant sector guidance in [working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) and the current restriction guidance.

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 can be worn by those exempt from wearing a face covering but they are not an equivalent alternative in terms of source control of virus transmission. They may protect the wearer against droplet spread in specific circumstances but are unlikely to be effective in preventing the escape of smaller respiratory particles 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.

The use of face coverings may have a particular impact on those who rely on visual signals for communication. 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.

Schools and FE providers have duties to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and students, to support them to access education successfully.

The following is a non-exhaustive list which provides examples of possible adjustments:

- The provision and effective use of assistive listening devices, such as radio aids.
- An increased focus on the listening environment, minimising all unnecessary background noise. Steps should be taken so that children with hearing loss are taught in classrooms with the best possible acoustic conditions.
- Allowing the use of speech-recognition apps on mobile devices and tablets in classrooms, taking into account possible variations in the effectiveness of such apps in different classroom situations.
- Additional communication support, including remote speech-to-text reporters or sign language interpreters.
- Separate one-to-one teaching and support, without the use of face coverings and in rooms where social distancing can be achieved and/or through a perspex panel.

Where appropriate, education settings should discuss with pupils and parents the types of reasonable adjustments that are being considered to support an individual.

## **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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