

Face Coverings in Schools Guidance and FAQ

Summary of Sandwell MBC advice to Schools

In line with Government guidance, schools in Sandwell will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas (year 7 and above) if they believe that it is right in their particular circumstances.

The advice of the Sandwell Public Health team is that the correct use of face coverings for staff and pupils in communal areas is likely to reduce the risk of virus transmission. Therefore, we would recommend schools adopt a policy of requiring face coverings in communal areas. However, this is not mandatory.

It is vital that face coverings are worn correctly and that clear instructions are provided to staff, children and young people on [how to put on, remove, store and dispose of face coverings](#).

Government guidance states that, in [areas of national government intervention](#), face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when in communal areas. Therefore, even if schools do not immediately adopt a policy of requiring face coverings, they should take steps to enable the swift introduction of this requirement should Sandwell become an area of national government intervention in the future.

Schools should update their risk assessments to reflect the changes they have put in place in the light of this revised national guidance

Evidence Base

There is some evidence that the general public wearing face coverings prevent transmission of COVID-19. They can protect the person wearing the covering and protect others. Other control measures such as social distancing, respiratory and hand hygiene are more effective at preventing spread. Face coverings are recommended in areas of suspected / known transmission where there is limited ability to maintain other control measures. Face coverings should be seen as the last control measure not as the first. WHO state that children 12 years and older should be treated as adults as far as face coverings are concerned.

Face coverings must be worn correctly in order to be effective. They have to fully cover both the mouth and nose at all times. They should not be touched or manipulated once worn and should be replaced when they become damp / soiled. Hands must be decontaminated (soap and water or alcohol gel) after removing.

There are disadvantages to wearing face coverings. Incorrect use can increase the risk of infection. They can lead to a false sense of security, localised skin irritation and feelings of anxiety and claustrophobia. There are also communication issues with people who are deaf / hard of hearing.

Face coverings should not be confused with face masks which are medical devices and are considered personal protective equipment (PPE).

National Guidance

The government announced on 25th August that it is revising its guidance on face coverings for staff and children in Year 7 or above in England. This advice note is for schools and other education institutions that teach people in years 7 and above in England. There is separate guidance for [early years and childcare providers](#) and [schools with children in year 6 and below](#).

Nationwide, while the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary, schools will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas if they believe that is right in their particular circumstances.

In addition, and consistent with WHO's new advice, the government will advise additional measures are taken in areas where the transmission of the virus is high. In these areas, defined as areas of national government intervention as [listed on gov.uk](#), the government's guidance will state face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils in secondary schools when moving around the school, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain. It will not be necessary to wear face coverings in the classroom, where protective measures already mean the risks are lower, and where they can inhibit learning.

This revised approach will also apply to further education colleges and will be reflected in guidance to universities, but not to children in primary schools where the risks to children are lower.

In any areas under 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. As in the general approach, it will not usually be necessary to wear face coverings in the classroom, where protective measures already mean the risks are lower, and they may inhibit teaching and learning.

Children should bring in their own face coverings but schools should have a supply of face coverings available for students who are not able obtain one.

Control Measures

Face coverings do have some efficacy in preventing the spread of COVID-19 but do not replace the need for further control measures. They should be used in conjunction with other control measures such as social distancing and hygiene measures and must not replace them.

How to Wear a Face Covering

Face coverings must fully cover both the mouth and nose at all times. They should not be touched or manipulated once worn and should be replaced when they become damp / soiled.

Hygiene

Hands must be decontaminated (soap and water or alcohol gel) before putting on and after removing face coverings.

What's the difference between Face Coverings and Face Masks?

Face coverings should not be confused with face masks which are medical devices and are considered personal protective equipment (PPE). People who were previously shielding (staff and pupils) should consider using surgical face masks for additional protection.

Sports

Face coverings are not recommended when exercising / playing sports.

Visors

Visors are not generally recommended (they are less effective than face coverings) but in some settings (eg. where the face needs to be visible) a face visor may be indicated. Face visors must cover the whole face in order to be effective.

Exceptions

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 are not required to wear a face covering.

Shielding

People who were previously shielding (staff and pupils) should consider using surgical face masks for added protection.

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

Sandwell has local lockdown restrictions in place, which puts all schools in tier 1.

Tiers of restrictions

Tier 1

The default position for areas in national government intervention is that education and childcare settings will remain open. An area moving into national intervention with restrictions short of education and childcare closure is described as 'tier 1'. There are no changes to childcare, and the only difference in education settings is that where pupils in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.