

01/09/2020

Guidance and information for Cheshire and Merseyside's schools relating to the use of face coverings in communal areas

Issued jointly by Cheshire and Merseyside's Directors of Public Health

Dear Headteacher,

You will be aware that from 25th August 2020, the guidance on the use of face coverings in schools has changed. The guidance now states that **face coverings (for pupils and staff) will be mandatory in communal areas of secondary schools where lockdowns are in place due to higher Covid-19 transmission.**

The new guidance also states that in areas that do not have higher transmission, Headteachers will have the flexibility to decide whether face coverings are to be used.

Whilst Cheshire and Merseyside has not yet been placed in a local lockdown, the region is experiencing an increase in local transmissions of Covid-19 which, if left to increase further, may result in lockdown restrictions being put in place. With this in mind, we are strongly encouraging the use of face coverings by staff and pupils (Year 7 and above) when moving around in communal areas or corridors, in the event that social distancing is difficult to maintain.

This information is subject to change and it is important that you update your school's risk assessment to reflect this and the current guidance.

As many schools will be opening on week commencing 31st August, Cheshire and Merseyside's Directors of Public Health would also like to clarify the following points:

1. Face coverings, when used correctly, can provide some additional protection. However, social distancing, good hand/respiratory hygiene, keeping those who are ill or who have symptoms away from school and working effectively with the Test and Trace system remain the most important elements of your school's Covid-19 prevention activity.
2. When using face coverings, it is important that hand sanitiser is readily available and that the correct measures are taken when putting on and taking off the mask to avoid cross contamination. The [latest guidance](#) from the Department of Health and Social Care advises:
 - a. When wearing a face covering you should:
 - i. wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on
 - ii. avoid wearing on your neck or forehead
 - iii. avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could be contaminated with the virus
 - iv. change the face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it

- v. avoid taking it off and putting it back on a lot in quick succession
- b. When removing a face covering:
 - i. wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing
 - ii. only handle the straps, ties or clips
 - iii. do not give it to someone else to use
 - iv. if single-use, dispose of it carefully in a residual waste bin and do not recycle
 - v. if reusable, wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric
 - vi. wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed
- 3. In some cases, pupils may be exempt from wearing a face covering due to underlying health conditions or disability. It is important to identify these pupils and remind them of the extra precaution they must take to social distance where possible.
- 4. Current guidance states that face coverings will not generally be necessary in the classroom, even where social distancing is not possible. Face coverings can have a negative impact on learning and teaching and so their use in the classroom should be avoided.
- 5. Primary schools are not affected by this change in guidance. This is not only because there is reasonable evidence that younger children are significantly less likely to catch or transmit Covid-19, but also because the wearing of face coverings would not be practical, safe or effective in this age group.
- 6. As 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), many councils will not provide additional face coverings (even in the event of a local lockdown). As no-one should be excluded from education on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering, we would recommend that schools take steps to have a small contingency supply available to meet such needs. If you are unable to purchase face coverings for your school, please speak to your council, as some have committed to holding a small supply of PPE for schools in the event of an emergency.
- 7. Schools should also make an effort to discourage littering as much as possible by providing adequate waste disposal for disposable face coverings.

For further details of the new guidance, please follow this link:

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

Kind regards,
Cheshire and Merseyside's Directors of Public Health