



COVID-19
Interim Guidance for the use of face-coverings in childcare and educational settings

This document summarises interim recommendations for the use of face-coverings in childcare and educational settings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This interim guidance updates the earlier guidance on face coverings only and all other interim recommendations for educational settings, published on 1st July, including those on physical distancing still apply.

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for childcare and educational facilities regarding the use of face-coverings for staff and children in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rationale for the use of face-coverings in childcare and educational settings in the context of COVID-19

A small proportion (<5%) of overall COVID-19 cases reported in the EU/EEA and the UK are among children. Children are more likely to have mild or asymptomatic infection, meaning that infection may go undetected or undiagnosed. While very few significant outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools have been documented thus far, they do occur, and may be difficult to detect due to the relative lack of symptoms in children.¹

Cloth face coverings are now recommended in the community in certain settings for example where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from others and when using public transport. Cloth face-coverings act as a barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from traveling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the cloth face covering coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice.

SARS-COV-2 - the virus which causes COVID-19 - is a new virus. Although the main route of transmission is considered to be via secretions such as saliva and respiratory secretions or respiratory droplets, which are expelled when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks or sings, there is now increasing evidence which suggests the possibility of airborne transmission via smaller droplet nuclei particles or aerosols which can remain suspended in air over long distances and time.

There is now evidence from several studies^{2 - 14} for transmission of SARS-CoV-2 occurring from pre-symptomatic (someone who has not yet developed symptoms) and asymptomatic (someone who never develops symptoms) persons. Cloth face coverings are therefore intended to prevent transmission of the virus from the wearer (who may not know that they are infected) to those with whom they come into close contact.

Recommendations for use of face-coverings in childcare and educational settings

In childcare and educational settings, the implementation of mandatory face-covering usage is challenging, as it is known that children will have a lower tolerance and ability to use the face covering properly, and use of face-coverings by teachers and staff caring for very young children may cause undue stress to the children.

- It is challenging for staff caring for young children in pre-school settings to wear a face-covering, as this may cause undue stress and anxiety for the children. While a face covering is likely to be a more effective barrier, in this scenario a clear visor can be worn.
- It is not recommended that children attending primary school or pre-school/childcare settings wear face-coverings.

- It is recommended that teachers and staff in primary schools wear a face-covering when a physical distance of 2 meters from other staff or children cannot be maintained.
- It is recommended that teachers, staff and students attending secondary schools wear a face-covering when a physical distance of 2 meters from other staff or students cannot be maintained.
- In certain situations the use of clear visors should be considered, for example staff interacting with students with hearing difficulties or learning difficulties.
- All children on the post primary school transport scheme should be asked to wear face coverings unless there is a good reason not to do so.

Cloth face coverings should not be worn by any of the following groups:

- Primary school or pre-school children
- Any person with difficulty breathing
- Any person who is unconscious or incapacitated
- Any person who is unable to remove the face-covering without assistance
- Any person who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering, for example persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

Practical Considerations

- All staff and students wearing face coverings should be reminded to not touch the face covering and to wash or sanitize their hands (using a hand sanitizer) before putting on and after taking off the face covering.
- Information should be provided on the [proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings](#) (click on this link).
- All teachers and staff should be aware that they should wash or sanitize hands (using a hand sanitizer) before and after helping a student put on or adjust a face covering.
- Face coverings should be stored in a space designated for each student that is separate from others when not being worn (e.g., in individually labeled containers or bags).
- Cloth face coverings should be washed after every day of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled.
- Face coverings should not be worn if they are wet. A wet cloth face covering may make it difficult to breathe.
- Schools should consider having additional disposable face coverings available for students, teachers, and staff in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day.

References

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