

Clarification on the use of face coverings in post-primary schools

Wearing a face covering or mask does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.

Wearing of face coverings – a requirement

Staff and students, at post-primary level, are required to wear a face covering. The exemptions to this are set out below.

Cloth face coverings

Cloth face coverings are recommended for staff and students. Cloth face coverings act as a barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from travelling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the face covering coughs, sneezes, talks or raises their voice. 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.

Face coverings must not contain any slogans/logos/images that may cause upset or be deemed offensive to any member of the school community.

Visors

Cloth face coverings are more effective than visors. In the limited circumstances where a cloth face covering cannot be worn clear visors must be considered. The alternate use of a clear visor can also be considered when a staff member is interacting with students with hearing, communication, or other learning difficulties.

Exemptions

A medical certificate confirming that a student/staff member meets the criteria for any of the categories of exemption listed below *must be provided to the school*:

- any person with difficulty breathing who cannot wear a cloth face covering or a visor.
- any person who is unable to remove the cloth face-covering or visor without assistance.
- any person who has special educational needs/additional learning needs and who may feel distressed or very uncomfortable wearing the cloth face covering or visor. For example, this may include persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory issues, or tactile sensitivity.

In circumstances where a medical certificate is not provided, that person (staff or student) will be refused entry to the school.

Directions for effective use of face coverings

- Information should be provided by schools on the proper use, removal, and washing of face coverings. Advice on how to use face coverings properly can be found [here](#).
- All staff and students should be reminded not to touch the face covering and to wash or sanitise their hands (using hand sanitiser) before putting on and after taking off the face covering.

- All staff (and students, where applicable), should be aware that they should wash or sanitise hands (using a hand sanitiser) before and after helping a student put on or adjust a face covering.
- Face coverings should be stored in a designated space, for example, in an individually labelled container or bag.
- 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.

Whilst staff and students may wish to utilise their own face covering on a day-to-day basis, schools should have a stock of additional disposable or multi-use face coverings (or if appropriate, visors) for staff and students in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day or where required on an ongoing basis.

Use of medical grade face coverings

Schools should consider the specific circumstances where the use of medical face masks (to EU Standard EN 14683) may be more appropriate for staff as part of their risk assessment for employees returning to work (for example where staff by necessity need to be in close and continued proximity with students with intimate care needs such as Special Needs Assistants).

Students using school transport

All students on the post-primary transport scheme are required to wear face coverings, unless they have a medical certificate which exempts them from doing so (as outlined above).