RCSLT FAQs: Face Coverings

**Please follow the latest Government coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance.**

## Why do I have to wear a face covering?

The evidence suggests that face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease because they cover the nose and mouth, which are the main confirmed sources of transmission of the virus that causes coronavirus infection (COVID-19). However, face coverings are not a substitute for social distancing and washing your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds to limit the spread of COVID-19.

## What is a face covering?

In the context of the coronavirus outbreak, a face covering is something which safely covers both the nose and mouth. You can buy reusable or single-use face coverings. You may also use a scarf, bandana garment or hand-made cloth covering but these must securely fit round the side of the face and cover both the nose and mouth.

## Is this the same as personal protective equipment (PPE)?

A face covering is not the same as the surgical masks or respirators used as part of personal protective equipment (PPE) by speech and language therapists and other healthcare workers in higher-risk environments[[1]](#endnote-1).

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## What settings do you have to wear a face covering?

There are some places where you must wear a face covering by law. There are different rules on using face coverings across the UK and they are recommended in circumstances where social distancing is difficult.

You can find the full list here <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>

## What if I visit someone in a care home or hospital?

Face coverings are also needed if you go to hospital, community care settings or GP surgeries. They are advised to be worn in care homes, however individual settings may have their own additional policies and require you to take other measures.

## What if I do not wear a face covering?

If you do not wear a face covering in a required place you will be breaking the law and could be fined, the amount differs across the UK.

## Who does not need to wear a face covering?

You may have a reasonable excuse not to wear a face covering.

In England

The reasonable excuses include[[2]](#endnote-2):

* people who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability(within the meaning of section 6 of the Equality Act 2010[[3]](#endnote-3))
* where putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause you severe distress
* if you are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate

In Northern Ireland

The reasonable excuses include[[4]](#endnote-4):

* if you have a physical or mental illness or impairment, or a disability that means you cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering
* if putting on, wearing or removing a face covering would cause you severe distress
* if you are travelling with, or providing assistance to, someone who relies on lip reading to communicate

In Scotland

The reasonable excuses include[[5]](#endnote-5):

* you have a health condition or you are disabled, including hidden disabilities, for example, autism, dementia or a learning disability,  or are providing care for someone with a health condition or disability, and a face covering would be inappropriate because it would cause difficulty, pain or severe distress or anxiety to the wearer or the person in the care of the wearer, or because you cannot apply a covering and wear it in the proper manner safely and consistently
* you are communicating with someone else who relies on lip reading and facial expressions to communicate

In Wales

The reasonable excuses include[[6]](#endnote-6):

* You are not able to put on or to wear a face covering because of a physical or mental illness, or because of a disability or impairment
* You are accompanying somebody who relies on lip reading where they need to communicate

## What about people who communicate via lipreading?

You will not be acting illegally if you remove your face covering to communicate with someone you are travelling with who relies on lip reading or facial expressions.

## What about people with aphasia or dysarthria?

Across the UK, anyone with a disability can choose not to wear a face covering.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland if you have a communication difficulty as well as a physical or mental illness or impairment or disability you have a reasonable excuse not to wear a face covering. In Scotland if you have a communication difficulty as well as a health condition or disability then you can choose not to wear a face covering.

## What about people who stammer?

A stammer is not always considered as a “disability. However, if wearing a face covering causes you severe distress to your communication then this is a reasonable excuse not to wear one. However, this would depend on the individual and the circumstances. This may mean that somebody has a reasonable excuse not to wear a face covering sometimes but not others.

## Do I need to prove that I am exempt from wearing a face covering?

People who are exempt from wearing a face covering do not need to provide written evidence of this. Some people may feel more comfortable showing something that says they do not have to wear a face covering. This could be in the form of an exemption card or badge and the government has created some which you can download from their website [Access exemption card templates](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own)

**References:**

Refrences:

1. COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE) Guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings on Public Transport) (England) Regulations 2020 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/592/made> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Equality Act 2010 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Coronavirus (COVID-19): face coverings <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-face-coverings> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Coronavirus (COVID-19) Phase 3: staying safe and protecting others

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/pages/face-coverings/> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Requirement to wear a face covering <https://gov.wales/requirement-wear-face-covering-public-transport-wales> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)