

RCSLT Statement

The use of clear face masks

There is a communication challenge for all regarding reduced clarity and audibility while wearing face masks and face coverings. They cause barriers to communication for people who need to lip read or use facial expressions to communicate.

Facial expressions are particularly important when we are stressed or unwell or in a noisy or unfamiliar environment, so clear face masks would potentially have a general benefit. There is though, an issue of equality in respect of the deaf community and those with hearing impairment, who rely on lip reading to communicate on an equal basis.

It is also the case that the appearance of opaque personal protective equipment (PPE) may be distressing or confusing for people with communication challenge, including potentially people with aphasia, autism, dementia or with learning disability, as well as children.

As health services restart, it is not always possible for speech and language therapists to work at a two-metre distance from their clients. By nature of what they do, which is supporting and developing someone's speech, language and communication, it is important that their client can see their mouth and face, in a safe manner. The use of transparent face masks is therefore vital.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists has been lobbying for the introduction of clear face masks over the past months. Progress has been made and the government has confirmed that ClearMask is the supplier whose mask has been approved for use in the NHS and social care.

It is now essential that speech and language therapists have access to these clear masks to enable them to resume safe services with their clients.

So far only one supplier has met the required health and safety standards. Other products are being developed and tested and it is hoped that they will meet the required safety standards in due course. RCSLT agrees that it is vitally important these rigorous standards are adhered to. It is essential that any mask is properly certified to ensure that speech and language therapists and their service users are properly protected at all times.