



Guidance on the use of Face Coverings FAQs

1. What is the change in primary schools in relation to the wearing of face coverings?

A decision was taken by Government on 30 November 2021 that face coverings should be worn by pupils third class and upwards in primary schools. This was communicated to schools via a letter from the Department of Education on the same date.

2. When does this come into effect?

The requirement for the wearing of face coverings is for immediate implementation. However, at the time of publication of these FAQs (1 December 2021) it is recognised and understood that schools will take a practical approach in the next day or two in communicating the new measures to parents and ensure parents can provide masks to children prior to its implementation.

3. How long will this requirement last?

The letter issued to schools on the 30 November 2021 states that the measure is a temporary measure and will be subject to review in mid-February 2022.

4. Is it mandatory for a child to wear a face covering?

Although the guidance is not on a statutory footing, the information note issued to schools is unequivocally clear that this is a requirement for all pupils. There are some limited exemptions to this requirement as outlined in Question 6 below.

5. Who does the wearing of face coverings apply to?

The measure will apply to pupils from third class upwards in primary schools until the advice is reviewed in the new year.

6. Are there any exemptions to the wearing of face coverings?

The DE has set out three categories of exemptions to the requirement to wear a face covering. These include:

- any pupil with difficulty breathing or other relevant medical conditions
- any pupil who is unable to remove the cloth face-covering or visor without assistance
- any pupil who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the cloth face covering or visor, for example pupils with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

7. How does a school get confirmation that a pupil falls into a category for exemption?

The vast majority of exempted children will not require medical certification to receive an exemption from wearing a face covering. Schools are familiar with their pupils needs and are well placed to identify those children whose complex needs mean the wearing of face covering may not be possible and will discuss this with parents as required. In such circumstances, a school will not require medical certification to provide an exemption to the wearing of face coverings.

8. What should happen where a parent/guardian refuses to provide their child with a face covering or if the pupil refuses to wear a face covering coming in to the school?

The school should engage with the parents/guardians and explain the requirements for the use of face coverings. Further guidance is being sought from the Department as to the appropriate process/procedure where there is a continuous refusal to cooperate.

9. What happens if a pupil (who is not exempt, as set out in Question 6 & 7) refuses to wear a covering while in attendance at school?

It is expected that the school community including pupils adhere to and comply with the school's Covid-19 response plan. A school should engage with the pupil and explain the requirements for the use of face coverings. The school should engage with the child's parents/guardians as outlined above.

10. How often must the child wear the face covering during the day?

It is expected that the child wears the face covering for the full duration of the school day with the exceptions outlined in Qs. 11-14 below.

11. Can a face covering be removed for break time e.g. taking a drink, eating lunch?

A common-sense approach should apply. The removal of face coverings for brief periods for the consumption of snacks, taking of water/beverages and any post meal hygiene is permissible.

12. Can the mask be removed when the pupils go to the yard for play time?

Yes, the face covering can be removed for play time on the yard.

13. Can the mask be removed for P.E. or other sporting activities?

Yes. However, P.E. and other activities should take place to the greatest extent possible outdoors. Where P.E. and sporting activities are taking place indoors schools should ensure that the space is well ventilated. Schools should also use CO2 monitors for that purpose.

14. Can the mask be removed for music e.g. singing, choir, musical instruments e.g. tin whistle?

Yes. However, a practical approach should be taken. Consideration should be given to the space available and the ventilation measures in place. Distance between the pupils/performers should be maximised.

15. If a child forgets or damages his/her face covering should the school provide him/her with one?

Yes. Schools should have a sufficient supply of masks for that purpose.

16. Should a pupil be assisted with his/her face covering?

It is expected that pupils from this age cohort (3rd class and above) should be able to put on and remove their own face coverings without assistance. However, in those exceptional circumstances where there is a requirement to assist a pupil at a given time, hands should be sanitised before and afterwards.

17. What happens if the class is mixed (i.e. is from Junior Infants to third Class)?

Where there are mixed classes, only children in 3rd class and above, are required to wear face coverings. However, pupils in the other classes are not precluded from wearing a face covering if their parents/guardians wish for them to do so.

18. Are all school staff expected to comply with the new measures?

Yes. The Covid Response Plan issued to Schools in August 2021 states that school staff are obliged to keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

19. What about children who use the school transport scheme?

Pupils from 3rd class and upwards on the primary transport scheme are required to wear face masks/coverings subject to the exemptions outlined above.