

Public advised to cover faces in enclosed spaces

- People who use public transport or visit shops should consider covering their mouth and nose, based on advice from SAGE
- Face coverings are not a replacement for social distancing and regular handwashing which remain the most important actions, says Chief Medical Officer
- Public urged not to buy medical grade masks so they can be saved for frontline health and care workers, but instead make their own face coverings at home

The public is advised to consider wearing face coverings in enclosed public spaces where you may be more likely to come into contact with people you do not normally meet, the government announced today.

After careful consideration of the latest scientific evidence from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), the government confirmed face coverings can help reduce the risk of transmission in some circumstances.

Face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are suffering from coronavirus, but not showing symptoms. People with coronavirus symptoms, as well as members of their household, should continue to follow the [advice to self isolate](#).

They may be beneficial in places where it is hard to follow maintain social distancing measures. This applies when using public transport, such as trains, buses and metro systems, or when visiting shops.

They do not need to be worn outdoors, while exercising, in schools, in workplaces such as offices, and retail, or by those who may find them difficult to wear, such as children under two or primary aged children who cannot use them without assistance, or those who may have problems breathing whilst wearing a face covering.

The public is being strongly urged not to purchase surgical masks or respirators, which are prioritised for healthcare workers working in more high-risk environments where the risk is greatest.

Instead the public is encouraged to make face coverings at home, using scarves or other textile items, which many will already own. [Read the guidance on how to wear and make a cloth face covering](#).

Health Minister Jo Churchill said:

At all times our strategy for keeping the public and the NHS safe during this crisis has been guided by the science.

Today, thanks to the evidence provided by our expert scientists, we are advising people to consider wearing a face covering if they can in enclosed public spaces where social distancing is impossible, for example on public transport or in shops. This may help prevent you spreading the virus to others.

You do not need a clinical mask which are prioritised for our healthcare workers. Instead a face covering is sufficient and we encourage people to make these at home with items they will already own.

Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer said:

Wearing a face covering is an added precaution, that may have some benefit in reducing the likelihood that a person with the infection passes it on.

The most effective means of preventing the spread of this virus remains following social distancing rules and washing your hands regularly. It does not remove the need to self-isolate if you have symptoms.

COVID-19 can be spread directly by droplets from coughs, sneezes, and speaking. These droplets can also be picked up from surfaces by touch and subsequently from touching the face. That is why hand hygiene is so important in controlling the infection.

Evidence shows a face covering can help in reducing the spread of droplets and therefore potentially infecting others, and could help to reduce the spread of infection as lockdown measures start to be lifted. It is important the public refrains from touching their face covering when wearing it, where possible, to avoid hand to mask transmission of the virus.

Government will not be supplying face coverings centrally as at home items and fabrics readily available on the market can be used, but it is important to wash them after every use.

Research from the WHO showed that where masks were recommended for prolonged periods of time, some wearers failed to maintain good handwashing practices or follow social distancing policies, putting others at risk. As England has demonstrated strong adherence to social distancing, the government is confident face coverings can be recommended as an added precaution in certain environments rather than an essential part of social distancing policies.

For workers in various sectors, or in public transport, the government is advising they continue to follow the advice of their employers and make sensible workplace adjustments. Further guidance on safer workplaces and on transport will be published shortly.

Government has produced guidance for employees and in it they emphasise and

reassure employers that for the majority the most effective way they can ensure that their employees are safe at work is to make sensible workplace adjustments, including erecting perspex screens which many supermarkets have already introduced.

Face coverings do not need to be worn in schools.