

A guide to face coverings



What is a face covering?

A face covering is a fabric covering that covers the nose and mouth. You can buy both reusable and disposable face coverings, or you can use a scarf or bandana.

You can also make your own out of an old t-shirt or other material.

[Read how to make your own face covering](#)

[How to make your own face covering without sewing](#)

Why are we being told to wear face coverings?

Face coverings do not replace social distancing measures. You should still try to keep a safe distance from people, 2m if possible, and wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based sanitiser if that is not possible.

In enclosed spaces like shops and supermarkets, where social distancing is difficult, there is growing evidence face coverings have a role to play in stopping the virus from spreading.

Although a face covering offers little protection to the person wearing it, it will help stop that person infecting someone else. This is important as some people are infected with Covid-19 but do not realise as they have no symptoms.

If we all wear face coverings, we all protect each other.

Where do I have to wear a face covering?

From the 24 July 2020 you will legally be required to wear a face covering in England in:

- shops (including buying food and drink to take away from cafes and shops)
- supermarkets
- banks and building societies
- post offices

You do not have to wear a face covering in:

- eat-in restaurants and pubs
- hairdressers and other treatment salons
- gyms and leisure centres
- cinemas, concert halls and theatres

This is because these venues have other measures in place to keep staff and customers safe.

Individual businesses may ask you to wear a mask as part of their own Covid-19 secure measures.

People who do not need to wear a face covering

You do not need to wear a face covering if you have a legitimate reason not to. This includes:

- young children under the age of 11
- not being able to put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability
- if putting on, wearing, or removing a face covering will cause you severe distress
- if you are travelling with or helping someone who relies on lip reading to communicate
- to avoid harm or injury, or the risk of harm or injury, to yourself or others
- to avoid injury, or to escape a risk of harm, and you do not have a face covering with you
- to eat or drink, but only if you need to
- to take medication
- if a police officer or other official requests you remove your face covering

You may also remove your face covering if:

- asked to do so by shop staff for the purpose of age identification
- speaking with people who rely on lip reading, facial expressions, and clear sound. Some may ask you, either verbally or in writing, to remove a covering to help with communication

Wearing and handling a face covering correctly

A face covering should:

- cover your nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably
- fit comfortably but securely against the side of the face
- be secured to the head with ties or ear loops
- be made of a material that you find to be comfortable and breathable, such as cotton
- ideally include at least two layers of fabric (the World Health Organisation recommends three depending on the fabric used)
- unless disposable, it should be able to be washed with other items of laundry according to fabric washing instructions and dried without causing the face covering to be damaged

When wearing a face covering you should

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on
- avoid wearing on your neck or forehead
- avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could be contaminated with the virus
- change the face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it

When removing a face covering

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing
- only handle the straps, ties, or clips
- do not share with someone else to use
- if single use, dispose of it carefully in a residual waste bin and do not recycle
- if reusable, wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed

Disposing of face coverings properly

If you have chosen to buy a disposable face covering, then you should put it in with your general rubbish or in a litter bin. Do not drop them on the floor as litter.

Do not put them in your recycling bin or recycling sacks.

Washing reusable face coverings

Cloth face coverings can be washed with your normal laundry at the hottest temperature possible for that fabric.

You can also hand wash them with soap and warm water.

Air drying is advised as it will help protect the elastic. Put them on a towel or piece of kitchen towel while they dry.

Advice from the UK government is to wash them regularly but unfortunately no definition of 'regularly' is given. Washing your face covering after every use is a sensible precaution.

If you believe, or know, you have come into contact with someone who has Covid-19 while wearing your face covering, then you should wash it as soon as possible.

Storing face coverings

You are advised not to carry them in a purse, bag, or pocket as it risks spreading the virus to other surfaces if you do come into contact with Covid-19. Instead store it in a zip lock bag or similar when not in-use so you can keep it separated from other items.

Avoid putting your mask down on a table or kitchen counter or other surfaces. If you do you will need to clean that surface afterwards.

You can also watch Worcestershire County Council's video on [how to wear, store and wash face coverings safely](#).