

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?

You are legally required to wear a face covering in the following locations:

- public transport (aeroplanes, trains, trams and buses)
- transport hubs (airports, rail and tram stations and terminals, maritime ports and terminals, bus and coach stations and terminals)
- shops and supermarkets (places which offer goods or services for retail sale or hire)
- shopping centres (malls and indoor markets)
- auction houses
- premises providing professional, legal or financial services (post offices, banks, building societies, high-street solicitors and accountants, credit unions, short-term loan providers, savings clubs and money service businesses)
- premises providing personal care and beauty treatments (hair salons, barbers, nail salons, massage centres, tattoo and piercing parlours)
- premises providing veterinary services
- visitor attractions and entertainment venues (museums, galleries, cinemas, theatres, concert halls, cultural and heritage sites, aquariums, indoor zoos and visitor farms, bingo halls, amusement arcades, adventure activity centres, funfairs, theme parks)
- libraries and public reading rooms
- places of worship
- funeral service providers (funeral homes, crematoria and burial ground chapels)
- community centres, youth centres and social clubs
- public areas in hotels and hostels
- storage and distribution facilities
- In a private hire vehicle or taxi
- In a hospitality venue (pub, restaurant, café etc), except when seated at a table to eat or drink

You should also wear a face covering in indoor places not listed here where social distancing may be difficult and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet.

Face coverings are needed in NHS settings, including hospitals and primary or community care settings, such as GP surgeries. They are also advised to be worn in care homes.

You do not have to wear a face covering in:

- gyms and leisure centres

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

When you 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:

- children under the age of 11 (Public Health England do not recommend face coverings for children under the age of 3 for health and safety reasons)
- people who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability
- police officers and other emergency workers, given that this may interfere with their ability to serve the public
- where putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause you severe distress
- to avoid harm or injury, or the risk of harm or injury, to yourself or others - including if it would negatively impact on your ability to exercise or participate in a strenuous activity
- if you are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate

There are also scenarios when you may remove your face covering. These include:

- if asked to do so in a bank, building society, or post office for identification
- if asked to do so by shop staff or relevant employees for identification, for assessing health recommendations (e.g. by a pharmacist), or for age identification purposes including when buying age restricted products such as alcohol
- if required in order to receive treatment or services, for example when getting a facial
- in order to take medication
- if you are delivering a sermon or prayer in a place of worship
- if you are the persons getting married in a relevant place
- if you are undertaking exercise or an activity and it would negatively impact your ability to do so
- if you are aged 11 to 18 attending a faith school and having lessons in a place of worship as part of your core curriculum
- if you are an elite sports person, professional dancer or referee acting in the course of your employment
- when seated to eat or drink in a hospitality premise such as a pub, bar, restaurant or cafe. You must put a face covering back on once you finish eating or drinking

If you cannot wear a face covering for age, health or disability reasons, then you do not have to seek advice or request a letter from a medical professional to prove it.

You may choose to wear or display a badge or sign that states you are exempt from wearing a face covering, You do not have to do this by law.

The Government has provided printable exemption cards you can print off at home and turn into badges or use on the back of your mobile phone, should you wish.

[Printable exemption cards](#)

People working in indoor settings

From 24 September, it will be compulsory for retail, leisure and hospitality staff to wear a face covering in areas that are open to the public and where they come or are likely to come within close contact of a member of the public. This includes shops, supermarkets, bars, pubs, restaurants, cafes, banks, estate agents, post offices and the public areas of hotels and hostels.

For other indoor settings, employers should assess the use of face coverings on a case by case basis depending on the workplace environment, other appropriate mitigations they have put in place and whether reasonable exemptions apply.

For recommendations and requirements in specific settings please check the government's [workplace settings guidance](#).

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](#).