



Using face coverings in school during the COVID-19 pandemic

An explanation for staff, students and families.



Initial draft: 12th May 2020

Last updated: 5th August 2020

Update and summary of current school policy (5.8.20)

Since our initial draft the advice on face masks/coverings has shifted further in favour of their general use. On June 5th 2020 the WHO made it clear that “governments should encourage the general public to wear masks”, especially where physical distancing may be more difficult¹².

In England as of July 31st the Government updated its guidance to instruct that, by law, face coverings must be worn in shops, public transports, shopping centres, cinemas, theatres, museums, places of worship, community centres, premises offering professional services and other indoor venues from August 8th 2020. This guidance can be found [here](#).

Rightly, the list of venues where masks are required has grown and now includes a great number of indoor settings. At Blatchington Mill we have felt strongly that face coverings were important for some time, with staff and students wearing them from June 2020 during school partial opening. Now national guidance has been changed it is even more obvious that face coverings should be worn in school settings where: physical distancing is more challenging; individuals are moving around site; students come into contact with other students outside of their bubble (e.g. travel to and from school on public transport, entry and exit to school site).

The latest guidance [here](#) and [here](#) provide details of how to wear face coverings and how to make a basic version if not purchasing. At Blatchington Mill we have already made hundreds of masks of students and colleagues since May (see right). We will continue to make masks and our intention is to have enough to give each student one. All students in year 11 will have a mask already from their in school sessions at the end of last year.



However we have now added a face coverings to our equipment list. This means all students are now expected to bring in their own face covering/mask for use in school and wear it as instructed. We will have monitoring in place on site to assist students in remembering to wear their face covering.

To summarise, from the return to school in September, students:

Will bring their own face covering to school.

These can be custom made/patterned but must not contain slogans or images/language that others may find inappropriate. See the image above for examples.

Will wear face coverings when moving around the school site, from their arrival at school and when moving to their designated classrooms in which they will do their work. This also includes wearing them when they move around the site during the day for example to the toilet or outside for a break - all scenarios where physical distancing will be harder to maintain due to unpredictability of movement and increased contact with others.

This closely matches findings in the BMJ³ that stated: “People should wear cloth face coverings in public places where social distancing measures are “difficult to maintain,” and that “there is enough evidence to support the use of facemasks for short periods of time by particularly vulnerable individuals when in transient higher risk situations.”

Are not required to wear face coverings when stationary and sat working in their classrooms due to the fact they are in fixed teaching bubbles and they have much greater control over their movement. Equally if students are seated still outside and maintaining distance appropriately they will not be required to wear them. However students and staff may choose to wear them in these situations, that is their choice.

¹ [who-changes-advice-medical-grade-masks-over-60s](#)

² [www.who.int/dg/speeches/5-june-2020](#)

³ [Covid-19: What is the evidence for cloth masks?](#)

Discussion and further explanation

There are many considerations to work through when planning for the safe return of any students to school during the COVID-19 pandemic - behaviour, hygiene, physical and mental health, site use and movement to identify a few. This is a complex undertaking for schools who are being asked to fully rethink how we provide schooling. The World Health Organisation offers an overview of some of this complexity and in its paper: *“Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19”*⁴.

One aspect of this is how the school fulfills its duty to protect staff and students and support the wider community. One of the considerations here is the use of face coverings and their role in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

It is fair to say that there has been increasing support for face coverings over the past few months from those in a position for expert knowledge^{5 6} including from the BMJ and academics like Dr Trisha Greenhalgh, Professor of Primary Care Research at the University of Oxford, who has argued clearly that masks *“could have a substantial impact on transmission with a relatively small impact on social and economic life.”*⁷ Professor Greenhalgh has further addressed the arguments against face coverings for public use, directing our attention to important ‘stories’ and studies that suggest that face masks can limit the spread of infection, not necessarily by protecting the wearer from infection but by *‘protecting others from droplets emitted by the wearer’*. The whole review is an excellent explanation of how in the real world adopting measures like masks make sense and are achievable⁸. This view is roundly supported by other scientific professionals not least Venki Ramakrishnan, the President of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge who has stated that mask wearing is important tool in fighting COVID-19 and goes onto suggest that in schools in particular, where social distancing is challenging, mask wearing is sensible⁹

Moreover it is worth pointing out that a significant number of those tested for COVID-19 have presented with no symptoms^{10 11}. When we think about these asymptomatic cases combined with those who may be pre symptomatic - also without symptoms - we know that there will be a number of individuals in our community who are COVID-19 positive and are unaware, going about their day going to work or school. This is unavoidable, though we know there are measures we can take to limit the impact.

It is clear that recent government advice on the public use of PPE, notably the wearing of face masks, is chiefly influenced by fears about the supply to medical professionals working with suspected cases of COVID-19. It is certainly true this supply chain needs to be protected. Even so **the government has recommended the use of face coverings in several contexts that are very similar to that of schools**¹². Indeed it is increasingly recognised that face coverings are of significant benefit in schools, particularly in the secondary setting. Advice produced by Association of School and College Leaders in interview with Dr Peter Drobac of the University of Oxford notes that asymptomatic carriers can be responsible for as much as *“40% of cases”* transmitted and points to countries with the most success in keeping the virus under control being those where mask wearing is the norm in public¹³. The ASCL discussion points out that wearing masks is an act of altruism that wearing them in some contexts can lead to a 79% reduction in transmission. The discussion makes clear that face coverings must be thought about seriously for schools with children who are more likely to be asymptomatic.

On the 11th May the Government *“advised [the public] 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.”*¹⁴ The advice goes on to specifically point out that **face coverings may be beneficial in places where it is hard to maintain social distancing measures**. This point is particularly pertinent to schools where shared use of rooms, movement of children around a site and the varying levels of awareness amongst students make social distancing harder to maintain.

Now on 31st July 2020 the Government has significantly broadened it’s legal requirement to wear face coverings in [a range of indoor settings](#).

The Government has outlined some of the reasoning for this stating that: *“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”*¹⁵.

And the latest guidance (31st July 2020) it has gone further, explaining that:

“Coronavirus (COVID-19) usually spreads by droplets from coughs, sneezes and speaking. These droplets can also be picked up from surfaces, if you touch a surface and then your face without washing your hands first. This is why social distancing, regular hand hygiene, and covering coughs and sneezes is so important in controlling the spread of the virus. The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering may reduce the spread of coronavirus droplets in certain circumstances, helping to protect others.

Because face coverings are mainly intended to protect others, not the wearer, from coronavirus (COVID-19) they are not a replacement for social distancing and regular hand washing. It is important to follow all the other government advice on coronavirus (COVID-19) including [staying safe outside your home](#).

If you have recent onset of any of the most important symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19):

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of smell or taste (anosmia)

⁴ [considerations-for-school-related-public-health-measures-in-the-context-of-covid-19](#)

⁵ [www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion](#)

⁶ [Coronavirus: Widen rules on where face coverings must be used, say UK doctors](#)

⁷ [Time to encourage people to wear face masks as a precaution, say experts](#)

⁸ [Masks for the public: laying straw men to rest](#)

⁹ [Andrew Marr: Shall be wearing of face masks mandatory?](#)

¹⁰ [Estimating the asymptomatic proportion of coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) cases on board the Diamond Princess](#)

¹¹ [COVID-19: What proportion are asymptomatic?](#)

¹² [face-coverings-when-to-wear-one](#) and [Public-advised-to-cover-faces-in-enclosed-spaces](#)

¹³ [ASCL Team webinar | 3 June 2020](#)

¹⁴ As above

¹⁵ As above

you and your household must isolate at home: wearing a face covering does not change this. You should have a test to see if you have COVID-19.

This thinking is very clear and shows face coverings have an important role in protecting others particularly because they: *“are not intended to help the wearer, but to protect against inadvertent transmission of the disease to others if you have it asymptotically”*¹⁶. This final point is important to grasp, **the use of face coverings is not primarily to protect the wearer from infection but rather to protect others from an infectious wearer by reducing the spread of the virus they will emit through breathing, sneezing, talking and so on**. This peer obligation is a powerful reason and one which we think all of the Blatch community will understand - in wearing a face covering you are acting to minimise risk to others and by extension their families, a concept firmly in keeping with the community spirit our students express so often.

The Government in its June guidance on the use of PPE in schools stated that:

*Wearing a face covering or face mask in schools or other education settings is not recommended. Face coverings may be beneficial for short periods indoors where there is a risk of close social contact with people you do not usually meet and where social distancing and other measures cannot be maintained, for example on public transport or in some shops. This does not apply to schools or other education settings.*¹⁷

This does not seem consistent at all with the rest of the advice given, not least as schools are indeed examples of enclosed public places where distancing can at times be challenging and also they are also places where individuals will come into contact with people they do not normally meet - two of the given reasons for using face coverings. Equally, the guidance from the government does not disclose the scientific evidence used to come to this position of not using masks in schools, which causes pressure as schools know that their families would not expect them to follow guidance uncritically or without due thought on the unique context of the school.

It seems likely that this contradiction is because there is some concern that the misuse of masks by younger children may exacerbate spreading of the virus - this though that is less relevant to a secondary setting where pupils can be trusted to do the right thing. Partly, there is not yet fully conclusive evidence on masks effectiveness at stopping infections for the wearer however as is explained there is an important difference between not having conclusive evidence yet and evidence actually suggesting face covering should not be worn. Where evidence may not be conclusive but points towards likely benefits, as is the case here, **it seems sensible to be cautious**.

This caution is summed up well in a review found in the British Medical Journal that states: *“If an aerosol droplet hits the weave of the mask fabric rather than the hole it is clearly arrested. And lessening the aerosol dose chips away at the R0 [reproduction number] and helps to slow the epidemic . . . They are not a cure but they address the longer flatter epidemic curve everyone is trying to achieve.”*¹⁸

To add to this, a recent global evidence review¹⁹ authored by a worldwide group of academics and scientists draws the conclusion that: *“The preponderance of evidence indicates that mask wearing reduces the transmissibility per contact by reducing transmission of infected droplets in both laboratory and clinical contexts...Thus **we recommend the adoption of public cloth mask wearing, as an effective form of source control, in conjunction with existing hygiene, distancing, and contact tracing strategies**”*.

Indeed, in the period since our initial draft of this explanation more evidence has become available strongly suggesting that the use of “Cloth face coverings, even homemade masks made of the correct material, are effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19 - for the wearer and those around them”²⁰

A full rapid review of evidence from the Royal Society and The British Academy can be found here: [Rapid review of evidence](#)

Further recent reviews of evidence can be found linked here [Wall Street Journal: face-masks-really-do-matter-the-scientific-evidence-is-growing](#)

It is important to note that face coverings are part of a suite of protective measures including hand washing, distancing, cleaning, minimising social mixing and so on that will occur regularly. But **it is clear that face covering use to support other safety measures is a precaution worth taking**.

Considering staff and families.

The World Health Organisation has stated that although it seems that children are less impacted themselves by COVID-19, with lower infection rates and mortality rates, there is still a risk of both of these albeit low. Equally, the WHO states that *“the role of children in transmission remains unclear”*²¹, which again points to the need to be cautious and **take every available precaution that would fit with your context**. This uncertainty about child transmission of the virus has featured in reports that state that SAGE has concluded that they have a low degree of confidence in the evidence that children transmit the disease less than to adults^{22 23}.

Recently studies have emerged that bolster the point that although less affected children are likely to spread the virus just as effectively as adults²⁴. Consequently we must be mindful of the risk this poses to families at home, vulnerable neighbours, vulnerable students and staff.

This raises pointed **concerns for the safety of the adults who will look after students at school** who are clearly at greater risk from any infection transmission. Much of the discussion about school return has rightly focused on children and their safety however we must remember that these children come into contact with adults in school and then when they return home to parents and family members. For many of these adults the risks of prolonged contact with children who are now travelling to school, often on public transport, and mixing with other students coming from different households for prolonged periods can be considerably greater. We will therefore continue to do everything as a school to protect our staff as well as students and their families.

¹⁶ [Our plan to rebuild The UK Government s COVID-19 recovery strategy.pdf](#)

¹⁷ [coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings](#)

¹⁸ [Covid-19: What is the evidence for cloth masks?](#)

¹⁹ [Face Masks Against COVID-19: An Evidence Review](#)

²⁰ [2020-07-08-oxford-covid-19-study-face-masks-and-coverings-work-act-now](#)

²¹ [Considerations-for-school-related-public-health-measures-in-the-context-of-covid-19](#)

²² [Coronavirus: Scientists only have 'low confidence' school children will spread virus less than adults](#)

²³ <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfc-chief-scientific-adviser-admits-he-hasnt-assessed-school-reopening-guidance/>

²⁴ [New Evidence Suggests Young Children Spread Covid-19 More Efficiently Than Adults](#) and [Contact Tracing during Coronavirus Disease Outbreak, South Korea, 2020](#)

What are other countries doing?

When considering the use of face coverings it is also worth exploring measures considered to be effective in similar contexts in other countries who are facing the same challenge of finding a way for children to safely return to school to support economic recovery and support students' academic and social welfare. In France teachers must be worn by teachers; the Spanish government has made masks compulsory in secondary schools where physical distance is not maintained and in Germany face coverings are compulsory. Further afield in Vietnam and South Korea, students and teachers will have to wear a mask except during mealtimes and similar precautions are being taken in Japan, China and Taiwan. Other countries such as Denmark and Canada are encouraging mask use. So globally, there is a trend towards greater caution in the return to school and indeed in considering the use of everything we can to maintain safety - including face coverings.

In a sense nothing is lost by taking this precaution. It seems prudent to try and eliminate risk as far as possible so if a safety measure such as wearing face coverings is possible it should be adopted in the same way we will adopt and facilitate individuals on site to socially distance, frequently hand wash and work in regularly cleaned areas.

Particular considerations in schools

There are some school specific scenarios that make the taking of face coverings as a precaution sensible. We remain in a pandemic and with UK citizens now able to go to work and leave home more regularly we will likely have pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic individuals on site who are moving, speaking and working in spaces with others. As we bring students back into school this is unavoidable as our students and staff come into contact with others in transit to and from school and in general through other members of their household. We know that the virus can also be **spread through the droplets expelled as people** speak, breath, cough and in a school, discussions and movement are frequent - possibly more so than in other workplaces.

Equally schools have been instructed that should an individual be tested positive for COVID-19 then anyone in their 'class' must also self isolate for 14 days - this is a significant measure, one that will cause families great difficulty. We know too that individuals can be pre-symptomatic for between 5 and 14 days so it is feasible that we will have students on site who have contacted Covid-19 and no one is aware of this for some days or at all. There is a risk of them passing this on. The significant impact infection could have on families means **it is only right that we take every reasonable precaution available - including the use of face coverings - to protect others**

What we will expect of staff and students on site?

So our position on face coverings is going to be more nuanced than guidance because we know our school well, including our excellent sense of community and care for one another. We will adopt the use of face covering in the following way. This is in addition to uses of PPE face masks and other relevant items for staff in roles where interaction with students, such as in medical, or required student personal care might enhance risk. These uses of PPE are explained in other guidance.

To summarise, from the return to school in September, students:

Must bring their own face covering to school.

Will wear face coverings when moving around the school site, from their arrival at school and when moving to their designated classrooms in which they will do their work. This also includes wearing them when they move around the site during the day for example to the toilet or outside for a break - all scenarios where physical distancing will be harder to maintain due to unpredictability of movement and increased contact with others.

This closely matches findings in the BMJ²⁵ that stated: *"People should wear cloth face coverings in public places where social distancing measures are "difficult to maintain," and that "there is enough evidence to support the use of facemasks for short periods of time by particularly vulnerable individuals when in transient higher risk situations."*

Are not required to wear face coverings when stationary and sat working in their classrooms due to the fact they are in fixed teaching bubbles and they have much greater control over their movement. Equally if students are seated still outside and maintaining distance appropriately they will not be required to wear them. However students and staff may choose to wear them in these situations, that is their choice.

Links to further reading:

- [Masks for all? The science says yes.](#)
- [Coronavirus-what-is-the-best-kind-of-face-mask](#)
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000hvt6>
- [So you're going outside](#)

²⁵ [Covid-19: What is the evidence for cloth masks?](#)

Additional Notes:

Visuals for students

COMMON MISTAKES

When using a face mask

en
COMMUNITY



Patterns and instructions used:

Follow this link for instructions: [HOW TO MAKE MASKS](#)

At BMS we created an adapted version of the following: [FACE MASK DESIGN](#), using 3 layers (front and back of tightly woven cotton and a middle layer of absorbent interfacing or similar) and elastic or bias binding. See image above.