

Face masks and face coverings – COVID-19

What is the difference between a mask and face covering?

Face masks are provided as personal protective equipment to protect against identified risks. The law requires that they be provided by the employer and must be worn by staff where identified as necessary following a risk assessment.

For some masks, such as tight-fitting face pieces with a filter (e.g. FFP3), staff must undertake a face fit test and be clean-shaven to ensure the face mask fits correctly.

Face masks must meet the minimum standards for the level of protection required, and therefore must come via a reputable supply route as there are a number of fake inferior products now on the market that fail to provide adequate protection.

Face coverings are very different. They are any material which covers the face whilst allowing comfortable breathing. Welsh Government advises these are made of at least 3 layers, in accordance with World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations.

Face coverings are not PPE so are not required to be worn however they are recommended to be worn where social distancing of at least 2 meters cannot be maintained. Face coverings are required to be worn by all persons using public transport or taxis.

Face coverings do not need to meet specific standards.

The rules regarding the requirement to wear face coverings differs in Wales from the rest of the UK.

Should I provide PPE to staff to protect against covid-19?

PPE is not generally an effective control against the risk of infection from the covid-19 virus. There is very little scientific evidence of widespread benefit from wearing PPE in non-medical or care settings. Instead, practicing good hand hygiene and social distancing are key to minimising the risk of infection.

Are face masks required for staff?

This will depend on your risk assessment but generally no.

Face masks are generally only required for health and social care settings and for administering first aid. Where face masks are usually needed to protect against other risks (e.g. fumes or dusts) to allow the work to be undertaken safely, they should continue to be provided.

Further information regarding face coverings and face masks at work during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may be found on the [Health and Safety Executive's website](#).

Are disposable gloves required to be provided to staff?

This will depend on your risk assessment but generally no, except for providing health and social care or administering first aid. Where gloves are usually needed to protect against a risk and allow the work to be undertaken safely they should continue to be provided. Gloves are generally not effective as a covid control as they become contaminated as soon as they touch an object. Wearing of gloves may also lead to staff being less vigilant around social distancing, hand-washing and not touching their face with unwashed hands.

Should staff wear face coverings?

Where it might be difficult to keep at least 2m social distancing from others, the Welsh Government recommends the wearing of 3-layer face coverings – [Welsh Government face covering guidance](#).

Staff should be encouraged to wear face coverings in these situations, and this should be reflected in the service area's risk assessment. The wearing of face coverings in Wales is a personal choice apart from on public transport and taxis. Face coverings are not a replacement for more effective measures such as social distancing, good hand hygiene (washing regularly for at least 20 seconds or rubbing in alcohol-based hand sanitiser until dry) and coughing and sneezing into a disposable tissue (or into the elbow area if a tissue is not available).

Where possible the environment should be organised to support social distancing.

Where face coverings are worn, they should cover both the nose and mouth.

To protect staff when using face coverings they should follow the following steps:

- hands should be washed / sanitised before putting on/taking off
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth at all times
- Store used face coverings in a plastic bag until washed
- Do not touch the front of the face covering, or the part of the face covering that has been in contact with your mouth and nose
- Once removed, clean any surfaces the face covering has touched
- Wash regularly
- Tuck away any loose ends
- Dispose of face coverings responsibly to prevent cross-contamination and damage to the environment

As face coverings are not personal protective equipment, staff who choose to wear them should provide their own face coverings.

How can I keep staff safe?

The most effective measures to prevent spread of covid 19 are:

- Social distancing and restricting the number of people in a work area
- Good hand and respiratory hygiene
- Increased surface cleaning, particularly of surfaces frequently contacted by different people, such as door handles
- Assigning people to fixed teams (where appropriate) to minimise the number of people that may be asked to isolate if an individual tests positive for covid-19.
- Using screens/barriers to separate people.

The exact measures required will depend on your work area and service and your risk assessment should identify what you need to do.

What if social distancing cannot be maintained?

Staff should be encouraged to wear 3 layer face coverings in line with Welsh Government guidance where it is not possible to maintain 2m social distance, and to regularly wash their hands throughout the day, before and after eating, after coughing/sneezing, and after cleaning equipment or the environment. Hand sanitiser should be used where hand washing with soap and running water is not possible.

Where can I obtain face masks?

Where face masks and other forms of personal protective equipment (PPE) is required then there is a legal requirement to provide it. The need for PPE is based on a risk assessment.

If you routinely issue PPE for work activities, you should continue to do so and source via your usual methods

PPE to manage covid-19 risks must be sourced via CCBC's Health and Safety Division or Procurement to ensure that the PPE provided meets legal standards and will offer the level of protection needed – there are a number of fake inferior products now on the market that fail to provide adequate protection.

To obtain PPE please contact the Health and Safety Division by e-mailing healthandsafety@caerphilly.gov.uk stating what item and how many are required.

Do staff have to wear face masks and other forms of PPE?

If PPE is identified as necessary following a risk assessment then wearing of the PPE is a legal requirement, and the Manager must ensure that staff wear it as required. All staff required to wear PPE as part of their job must know how to put it on and take it off and dispose of it safely, and be provided with appropriate instruction and training to do so.

Further guidance on putting on and taking off PPE is available in Appendix 6 of the [Infection Prevention and Control for Childcare Settings Guidance](#) and via an [NHS training video regarding the donning and doffing of surgical face masks, aprons and gloves](#).

What should I do with used face masks and other forms of PPE?

Face masks and other forms of PPE potentially contaminated with covid-19 (e.g. that used to assist a symptomatic individual) must be double bagged and kept for 72 hours prior to disposal.

All other PPE may be disposed of in normal waste.

Face masks, gloves and aprons are generally considered single-use.

New sets should be worn if required to transfer from one setting to another to avoid cross-contamination.