



Face coverings: briefing for forces – England and Wales

This briefing provides information on face coverings for police officers and police staff and should be used to inform the development of force policies. It has been developed to accompany the procurement and distribution of face coverings to forces.

The following key points apply.

- Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect the wearer. However, if the wearer is infected but asymptomatic, a face covering may provide some protection for others with whom they come into close contact.
- Maintaining social distancing where possible, washing hands regularly with soap and water, and using hand sanitiser remain the most effective way to prevent transmission of disease.
- Policing is dynamic and situations can change without notice. If an officer or staff member are undertaking a policing activity with less than two metres between them and a member of the public, they should be wearing a fluid repellent surgical IIR mask, or a higher grade of protection as directed in the **PPE guidance**. This may necessitate, where practicable, the safe removal of a face covering before fitting PPE.
- A face covering is not to be used in conjunction with any other form of face mask, as this may cause breathing difficulties.

Legislation and government guidance on wearing face coverings

Various sets of Regulations are in force that require an individual to wear a face covering in different circumstances, eg, on public transport or when entering or remaining in a 'relevant place', such as a shop). There is also government guidance relating to when individuals should wear a face covering, eg, in healthcare settings in England.

In addition to being amended regularly, there can be differences between the English and Welsh versions of the Regulations, for example, relating to exclusions or reasonable excuses. The government guidance is also changing regularly in order to react to changes in circumstance. Officers and staff should, therefore, be aware of force policies that detail any requirement for their operational employees to wear face coverings as these will provide the relevant local context.

Forces are responsible for setting their own local policy regarding where officers and staff will be expected to wear face coverings. The decision to use face coverings must be based on a local assessment that considers the threat and risk, equality impact, and any relevant legislation and government guidance. This policy should also cover relevant 'off duty' concerns, such as travelling to and from work.

The distinction between PPE and face coverings

PPE:

PPE protects the user against health or safety risks at work.

It can include items such as **gloves, eye protection, aprons** and **high-visibility clothing**. It also includes respiratory protective equipment, such as **face masks**.

Where you are already using PPE in your work activity, you should continue to do so.



Face coverings:

Face coverings are not intended to protect the wearer. They are intended to protect against transmission of the disease to others if the wearer is infected but asymptomatic.

This is an example of a face covering.



See [Public Health England \(PHE\) guidance on face coverings](#)

How to wear, remove and look after your face covering

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions on wearing, removing and cleaning face coverings.

The following is generic information and provides a template for how to communicate instructions to staff.

A face covering is not the same as a PPE face mask, such as the fluid-repellent surgical IIR mask, FFP2 or FFP3 respirator mask. To ensure that a face covering can be as effective as possible, it must be maintained correctly.

Putting on the face covering

- Before handling your face covering, exercise good hand hygiene protocols by using a hand sanitiser gel, or by washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds then drying them.
- When placing the covering on your face, avoid touching your face or the inner surfaces of the covering.
- Hold the ear loops in each hand so the inside covering is facing you. Place the straps behind the ears and adjust them until the covering fits firmly but comfortably over the nose and mouth.

Removing the face covering

- When removing the covering, remove the restraining straps from around your ears and take the covering away from your face. Fold the face covering together and store it away from any clean face coverings.
- Exercise good hand hygiene protocols by using a hand sanitiser gel, or by washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds then drying them.
- Do not lay the face covering down on surfaces.
- When storing clean face coverings, always fold the covering together so as not to expose the inner layers. Store clean coverings separate from used ones.
- The face covering should be used for the shortest period of time possible. If it becomes damp or soiled, it should be replaced.
- If the face covering is damaged, it should be replaced.

Cleaning the face covering

- The face covering should be laundered in accordance with the manufacturer's instruction. You do not need to separate coverings from your household wash. Do not tumble dry or iron face coverings.
- Do not share face coverings with colleagues or family members.