

Coronavirus: When and how to wear a mask or face covering

Social distancing and good hand hygiene remain the best ways to protect yourself and others against coronavirus but many people are choosing to also wear a face mask or covering when out in public. Wearing a face covering on public transport in England and Scotland and when using an Uber in the whole of the UK is now mandatory as of the 15th June.

This is also the case if you are attending a hospital as a visitor or an outpatient. There are some exemptions for people with certain health conditions, children under the age of 11 and for people with certain disabilities.

You will not be able to travel if you don't wear a face covering and rail network operators in England will be enforcing these new rules and fixed penalty notices will be issued.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland the advice is that people should aim to wear a face covering in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible - for example, on public transport or in some shops. Face coverings have not been recommended for the general public in Wales. Face coverings are also encouraged in England in certain situations where social distancing is more difficult, such as in small shops.



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Guidance setting out further details of the changes for passengers has been published and can be found [here](#).

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If you have Covid-19 symptoms (cough, high temperature, or a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of smell or taste), you and your household must isolate at home: wearing a face covering does not change this.

Further research is needed to understand the effectiveness of wearing a mask in stopping the spread of the virus but evidence of their effectiveness is growing. The World Health Organisation which had earlier been reluctant to recommend masks in community settings, on June 5 shifted and issued a stronger recommendation for their use.



For police officers there are no hard and fast rules for wearing a mask or face covering. The college of policing has advised that this is a matter for individual forces. Officers should follow guidelines issued by their force in carrying out their role but this is also a matter for personal discretion.

Does it matter what sort of mask you wear?

Different types of mask offer different levels of protection. Surgical grade N95 respirators offer the highest level of protection against Covid-19 infection, followed by surgical grade masks. However, these masks are costly, in limited supply, contribute to landfill waste and are uncomfortable to wear for long periods.

The evidence on the protective value of single-use paper masks or reusable cloth coverings is less clear, but still suggests that face masks can contribute to reducing transmission of Covid-19.

It is important that you choose the type of face covering that is right for you. That gives you peace of mind and also allows you to breathe easily.



When using a face covering, it's crucial to use and dispose of it properly:

- Make sure it fits well and completely covers your mouth and nose, before going out check this by moving your head to test there aren't any gaps
- Ensure you can breathe comfortably.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitiser before putting it on and after taking it off.
- Avoid touching or adjusting the mask whilst wearing it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth at all times.
- Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it's damp.

If you don't follow these simple guidelines you may end up increasing your risk of infection.

When removing your face covering:

- Take it off from the back, do not touch your face.
- Do not touch the part of the face covering that has been in contact with your mouth and nose.
- Once removed, put it in a plastic bag until you can wash it or put it directly into soap solution.
- Make sure you clean any surfaces the face covering has touched.
- If you have a disposable filter remove and bin this before washing the mask.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after you have removed your face covering.
- You can wash your face mask with your other laundry, using your normal detergent, but make sure you wash it at least at 60 degrees
- Make sure it is completely dry before using it again.

For guidance on how to make a face covering at home click [here](#).

Regularly wearing a face covering can lead to discomfort, skin problems or anxiety. There are some things you can do to help:

- Ensure the mask is a good fit for your face to avoid rubbing and irritation.
- Apply a simple moisturiser 30mins before using the face covering.
- Drink plenty of water to keep your skin hydrated.
- Apply a liquid barrier film and allow to dry before putting on your face covering.
- Where possible avoid wearing the face covering for more than 2 hours at a time.
- Use a face covering that ties behind your head rather than loops being your ears to avoid rubbing.

Here are some tips to help if you feel anxious before or whilst wearing your face covering:

- **Challenge negative thoughts** – remember you're wearing the mask to keep yourself and others safe.
- **Focus on your breathing** – avoid rapid, shallow breathing, instead take long, shallow breaths.
- **Practice mindfulness** – bring yourself back to the present when you start to feel anxious.
- **Desensitize yourself** – wear your mask at home for short periods of time to get used to it.
- **Personalise your mask** – make the mask feel less clinical and more fun.
- **Choose the right mask** – try a mask made of lighter material or a face shield.

Useful links:

[Gov.uk](#)

[NHS](#)

[WHO](#)



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