

Factsheet 14

Updated on 17 July 2020

Advice regarding face masks and coverings

The following information has been designed for healthcare professionals.

COVID-19 has created controversy around the use of face masks and coverings in the transmission of the virus. Different countries have implemented different policies in regard to the use of face masks and coverings.

The UK's response

From the 24th July 2020, it will be mandatory to wear face masks and coverings in shops and supermarkets in England, in Scotland this guidance is already in place.

Whether England, Scotland or Wales, face masks and coverings must be worn by patients when visiting a healthcare professional whether this is in a surgery, pharmacy or hospital setting. It is important to recognise that a face mask or covering can cause a barrier in communication, therefore it may be necessary to adapt your approach to the consultation.

A report conducted by the University of Oxford investigated the effectiveness of different face mask types and coverings, including an international comparison of policies and behavioral factors underlying usage.

The study confirmed that people should wear masks to reduce virus transmission, helping to protect both themselves and others around them.¹

What to tell people around face masks and coverings?

- People should be advised that face masks should be worn in enclosed surroundings where they may meet people they don't normally meet.
- If people feel uncomfortable wearing a face covering, then advise them to try and use a face covering for short intervals at home first as this will help them get used to it.
- That they do not need to use a mask designed for clinical use.

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- People with lung diseases do not need to use a specific face covering, different coverings can be used as long as it covers their mouth and nose.
- All UK governments advise that if people who have respiratory conditions find that wearing a face covering makes them feel breathlessness then they do not need to wear them.
- People can be signposted to the government website on how to make their own cloth face covering click [here](#)³
- It is important to remind people to wash their face covering after every use and disposable masks should be disposed of appropriately.
- It is still important for people to socially distance in line with government policy; hand washing remains a clear priority to reduce the transmission of the virus.

References

1. British Lung Foundation (2020) Should I wear a face covering? Available from: <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus/what-should-people-with-a-lung-condition-do-now/face-coverings>
2. GOV.UK (2020) Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>
3. University of Oxford (2020) Oxford COVID-19 study: face masks and coverings work – act now <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-07-08-oxford-covid-19-study-face-masks-and-coverings-work-act-now/>