

DFE - UPDATE ON FACE COVERINGS IN SCHOOLS

The Department for Education is updating its advice on face coverings in schools.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) published a new statement on the 21 August on when children should wear face coverings. They now advise that “children aged 12 and over should wear a mask under the same conditions as adults, in particular when they cannot guarantee at least a 1-metre distance from others and there is widespread transmission in the area.”

As a result, the government is revising its guidance on face coverings for staff and children in Year 7 or above in England. Nationwide, while the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary, schools will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas if they believe that is right in their particular circumstances.

In addition, and consistent with WHO’s new advice, the government will advise additional measures are taken in areas where the transmission of the virus is high. In these areas, defined as areas of national government intervention as listed on gov.uk, the government’s guidance will state face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils in secondary schools when moving around the school, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain. It will not be necessary to wear face coverings in the classroom, where protective

measures already mean the risks are lower, and where they can inhibit learning.

This revised approach will also apply to further education colleges and will be reflected in guidance to universities, but not to children in primary schools where the risks to children are lower. Updated guidance on face coverings in all education settings will be published shortly and will come into effect from 1 September.

Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson said: Our priority is to get children back to school safely. At each stage we have listened to the latest medical and scientific advice. We have therefore decided to follow the World Health Organisation’s new advice. In local lockdown areas children in year 7 and above should wear face coverings in communal spaces. Outside of local lockdown areas face coverings won’t be required in schools, though schools will have the flexibility to introduce measures if they believe it is right in their specific circumstances. I hope these steps will provide parents, pupils and teachers with further reassurance.

Consistent with WHO’s advice, if the rate of transmission increases across the whole country, it may be necessary to apply stricter guidance on face coverings in schools nationally. This is not necessary at the moment but the government will keep the evidence on transmission under constant review.

