

# Face coverings in schools and colleges to remain in place

The government has today, Tuesday 6 April, confirmed that face coverings should continue to be worn in secondary school and college classrooms as a precautionary measure when students return after the Easter break.

This cautious approach will help limit the risk of transmission and enable continued monitoring of the effect of school and college returns, as twice weekly testing is established and embedded in pupil's routines.

It is expected that face coverings will no longer be required to be worn in classrooms, or by students in other communal areas, at step 3 of the roadmap, which will be no earlier than May 17th. At that point the next stage of easements, including increased social contact indoors, will be confirmed following a review of the latest data on infection and vaccination rates. It will also allow time for the vaccination programme to reach everyone in priority groups one to nine with their first dose before any change is committed.

All changes will be confirmed with one week's notice and all other safety measures will remain in place, including regular asymptomatic testing, smaller group bubbles, increased hygiene, ventilation, and social distancing where possible.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The return to school and college from 8 March has been an incredible success and I would like to thank staff, parents and pupils for their compliance with the guidance on reducing transmission of the virus. Our latest data also showed that attendance in school remains higher than at any point during the autumn term.

On top of the protective measures previously in place such as regular handwashing and ventilation, we introduced face coverings in the classroom for secondary schools and colleges to help reduce transmission in parallel with the introduction of twice weekly testing.

Schools and students have done a great job adapting to Covid secure guidance and working hard to make sure it doesn't impact learning. We obviously all want to get back to facemask-free classrooms and we will do this in line with the latest scientific data while balancing the interests of students, teachers and the wider community.

The ongoing review of evidence on the use of face coverings in schools and

colleges took into consideration a number of factors including scientific evidence and data from PHE and stakeholder intelligence gathered by the Department for Education on the experiences of face covering use in classrooms.

Rapid testing will continue to play a crucial role in keeping schools and colleges safe, as millions of tests are now taken each week by students and staff. With as many as one in three people who have the virus not displaying symptoms, testing is helping find and isolate cases, stopping outbreaks before they develop. Since 4 March this year, around 17 million coronavirus tests were taken across all nurseries, schools and colleges.

Alongside rapid testing, the available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering reduces the emission of virus-carrying particles when worn by an infected user, helping to protect others.

Those who are currently exempt from wearing face coverings will remain so, including pupils or staff who are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate.

Professor John Simpson, Head of Public Health Advice, Guidance and Expertise Pillar (PHAGE) at Public Health England, said:

The return to school after Easter will allow us to continue monitoring the impacts of measures to reduce the spread of Covid, as we encourage families to test regularly.

Wearing face coverings in secondary schools is an extra control measure to reduce the risk of transmission to support children continuing their education in the classroom.

ENDS