



# Face Covering Policy

December 2021

Review Date December 2022

	Signed	Date
Chair of Governors		
Headteacher		
Designated SLT		
Designated Governor		
Union representation		

**Aim**

Our single and most important aim is to maintain the health and safety of students, staff and therefore all members of the school and wider community.

From 6th December 2021 all adults and secondary students on the school site should wear a face covering when moving around corridors and when in communal areas where physical distancing is difficult to maintain.

This policy is presented after thoughtful consideration for all known and relevant factors. When in doubt, every individual should use their best judgement and common sense when wearing face coverings by keeping in mind the phrase, 'my mask protects you, your mask protects me.'

## **Rationale**

World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance on face coverings was published on 21st August 2020, recommending more extensive use of face coverings in school settings.

The Welsh Government has made its own statement (August 25th, 2020) that the use of masks by children and adolescents (12 years and over) should follow the WHO guidance.

This policy is guided by the following public health and social principles:

- To prioritise the best interests, health and well-being of each child and adult
- To enable all associated with Cyfarthfa High School to work and learn in a safe environment to the best of their ability

It is believed that by expecting people to wear face coverings we are:

- supporting the scientific position on their benefit in protecting others from infection by the wearer
- supporting emerging scientific evidence that suggests that the wearer of a face covering can also be protected
- recognising that it is difficult to physically distance in a school setting

The SLT are confident that the adoption of this policy will help us to reduce the risk of the spread of infection.

Whilst recognising the value face coverings can make to improving safety it is also noted that these are not a substitute for hygiene and safety measures such as being tested when displaying symptoms, self-isolating when unwell or advised to, social distancing, enhanced cleaning regimes and regular hand-washing. Indeed, the wearing of face coverings can only serve to enhance these measures.

## **Risk assessment**

Underpinning this policy is our risk assessment of specific factors that influence how our school operates and how all people move from place to place in order to work and learn. This includes different settings where other controls such as adequate distancing cannot be maintained.

This policy will take into account the overall balance of risks and benefits to all, including individuals with additional needs or disabilities.

### **Expectations for the wearing of face coverings**

Those who have an age, health or disability reason for not wearing a face covering should not be routinely asked to give any written evidence of this, which includes exemption cards. No person needs to seek advice or request a letter from a medical professional about his or her reason for not wearing a face covering.

Some people may feel more comfortable showing something that says they do not have to wear a face covering. This could be in the form of an exemption card, badge or even a home-made sign, available from Head of Year.

This is a personal choice and is not necessary in law.

### **When SHOULD a face covering be worn?**

Face coverings must be worn (except by those who are exempt) in all of the following areas and times:

#### **Entry to school buildings**

Everyone should wear a mask on entry to every school building because that is always a communal area or access to a corridor.

#### **In corridors**

Control mechanisms such as designated access and egress, school year contact groups, designated break areas and staggering of class times are in place for September.

However, there will be occasions e.g. on arrival to school, between lessons and at the end of the day when there will most likely be an element of unavoidable mixing. In order to reduce the risk of transmission everyone must wear a mask when walking through corridors or communal areas of the school buildings.

#### **At break and lunchtime**

Everyone should wear a mask when accessing the school dining area. It is recognised that face coverings are not very practical during eating and drinking. Students will need to remove their mask to do so and should wherever possible ensure they are situated two metres away from others, perform the necessary hand hygiene and replace the mask when they have finished eating or drinking.

#### **In classrooms**

All students will be able to sit alongside each other facing the front in classrooms. In this context, there is no obligation for students to socially distance but they should be 2 metres away from the member of staff present.

Staff and students can wear face coverings in classes where they choose to do so. There will be times when a face covering may not be appropriate, for example during presentations or speaking assessments. Students will be advised by staff in such circumstances.

Other control measures such as the availability of hand and surface hygiene, forward facing seating positions, no shared materials, reduced face-to-face contact and speaking more quietly are encouraged.

Specialised classroom / learning environments such as laboratories, technology workshops, drama, physical education

Wearing a face covering will be acceptable in many specialised settings, so long as it fits the individual well and has no loose parts hanging down that may come into direct contact with other hazards so that the risk of contamination is likely to be minimal.

However, there will be certain locations or activities where the risk of wearing a face covering for a particular activity is deemed unacceptable. In such cases, whole school and departmental risk assessments will consider the appropriateness of such work matched against WG guidance where social distancing cannot be consistently maintained. Where a risk assessment does identify an unacceptable risk, departments should seek additional advice as to whether a facemask or a different type of face covering would provide adequate mitigation.

### **With ALN or pastoral support**

Staff and students should wear a suitable face covering in any 'one-to-one' support session or in smaller group contexts.

If a personal meeting must take place with family members or multi-agency support workers this should be managed in a space which allows for appropriate social distancing. Where possible meetings should take place digitally to remove any risk of transmission.

When should a face covering NOT BE worn?

There are limited specific exceptions set out in this policy where face coverings can be removed.

These include:

- when alone in single occupancy offices, or when seated at a desk in a shared office
- (provided in all cases 2m social distancing is consistently maintained)

- when staff are working in settings with protective screens in place such as reception areas
- students that cannot wear a mask due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, mental health condition, or disability. In this instance the individual will need to discuss this with either the Form Tutor, Head of Year or Business Manager

Can a face covering be removed in the classroom?

All classrooms should retain a 2 metre distance between the member of staff. Even so, face coverings are encouraged to be worn by students and teaching / support staff except where exemptions apply to individuals, or if asked to remove a face covering to aid communication. The wearing of face coverings however is not compulsory within the classroom setting, as per WG guidance.

### Exemptions

In line with the exemptions that apply in public spaces such as on public transport and in shops, the requirement to wear face coverings in school buildings will not apply to those who have a legitimate reason. This includes:

- not being able to put on, wear, or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability
- if putting on, wearing, or removing a face covering will cause severe distress
- where interacting with someone who uses lip reading to communicate, or who has social communication impairments

Do I need to provide evidence that I am exempt from wearing a face covering?

On an individual basis there is no requirement to provide evidence of a legitimate reason not to wear a face covering, or that others may be required to remove theirs, so they are easier to understand (e.g. to lip read). However, a discussion should occur with the form tutor and the school Business Manager in order for the needs of the individual to be understood and to establish whether the school can provide further help and guidance to that individual.

Some people may feel more comfortable showing something that says they do not have to wear a face covering. This could be in the form of an exemption card or medical record.

As a school we do not want to make life in school any more difficult for anyone and will always try to work together to find solutions that work for everyone.

### About face coverings

What is a face covering?

A 'face covering' can be a covering of any type that covers the mouth and nose. It is recommended that it be made of cloth or other textiles and should preferably be at least three layers thick, and through which you can breathe.

Religious face coverings that cover the mouth and the nose count as face coverings for these purposes. Transparent face coverings, which assist communication for those who rely on lip reading and facial expressions, can also be worn.

Most face coverings are usually in the form of a 'mask' or 'visor' and principally acts to protect others by reducing airborne transmission of COVID-19. It does not protect the wearer from infection from others.

What sort of face covering should I wear?

A face covering should:

- cover your nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably
- fit comfortably but securely against the side of the face
- be secured to the head with ties or ear loops
- be made of a material that you find to be comfortable and breathable, such as cotton
- ideally include at least three layers of fabric (the World Health Organisation recommends three depending on the fabric used).
- Cyfarthfa High School will only supply and distribute face coverings, for each students, with three layers as these will be the standard issued by the local authority
- unless disposable, it should be able to be washed with other items of laundry according to fabric washing instructions and dried without causing the face covering to be damaged

What we expect at Cyfarthfa High School

All secondary school students are required to wear a clean face covering that covers the mouth and nose whilst in corridors and all communal areas. It is the individual's choice whether to wear a face covering within the classroom.

It is recognised that there will be occasions and situations, which will need to be managed on their individual merit and context. This may include consideration of face covering type, style, supply, wearing, exemptions, misplacement or loss during the school day, renewal when damp or soiled, safe putting on, removing, storage or disposal.

Cyfarthfa High School will supply facemasks where required - one reusable facemask issued by LA per students. Where students plan to use their own facemask, the mask must be plain, with no words or pictorial or symbolic representations that may be considered controversial and/or would detract and possibly cause offence to others in our school. In such circumstances, the student will be asked to wear a plain facemask.

How should I put on and remove a face covering?

When wearing a face covering you should:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on
- avoid wearing on your neck or forehead
- avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could become contaminated
- change the face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it

When removing a face covering:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing
- only handle the straps, ties or clips
- do not share with anyone else
- if single-use, dispose of it carefully in the pedal waste bins available and do not recycle if reusable, take it home to wash daily
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed

How should I look after my face covering?

- Face coverings should not be shared with others
- Make sure the face covering covers your nose, mouth and chin
- Re-usable face coverings should be washed every day
- Disposable face coverings must not create litter; please use the pedal waste bins available Dry masks on the highest dryer setting or use direct sunlight to dry masks.
- Ultra-violet light from the sun can kill up to 99.99% of pathogens on the sun-facing surface of a mask if it is left in the bright sun during the middle of a day for at least one hour. It is best to allow masks to be exposed to the sun and heat for an entire day.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Will the school provide face masks?

Yes we will. One face mask will be provided to students initially then up to a total of three masks where required. These will comply with minimum WHO guidelines and will be issued to the school by the Local Authority. Where possible we would still encourage each family to have face masks available as replacements for use on school transport and / or in school itself.

2. What if I forget my face covering?

Please alert a member of the pastoral staff IMMEDIATELY when you arrive on school premises. You will be issued with a replacement where possible or contact may be made. While making your way to a member of staff please make the best attempt you can to cover your nose and mouth.

3. Does wearing a face covering mean that 2m social distancing is not required?

Face coverings are not a substitute for good personal hygiene. They are an additional measure that should provide reassurance to others, particularly those who might be more vulnerable.

4. What should I do if I am concerned that someone is not wearing a face covering?

It is important to remember that some people will have legitimate reasons why they are not able to wear a face covering. Some of these reasons may be hidden and people should not be asked if they have an exemption, or the reasons for it. If you are in any doubt please report this to a member of staff and do not confront or challenge any individual about the wearing of face coverings.

5. What should I do if someone asks me to remove my face covering to aid communication?

Some people rely on lip reading or facial cues to aid communication. The wearing of face coverings by others can make this difficult or impossible. If someone asks you to remove your face covering to assist their communication then you should assess your individual risk and do so if deemed safe, paying particular attention to maintaining 2m social distancing during this period.

6. Will face coverings be provided to staff and students?

Staff and students will be issued with appropriate face coverings though everyone is encouraged to provide their own. Contractors and agreed visitors are responsible for providing their own face coverings for use within the school demise.

7. Can I wear a face shield / visor instead of a face mask?

It is important to note that the definition of a contact of an infected person under the NHS Test and Trace system (who would be required to self-isolate for 10 days) does not take into account whether face coverings were worn, and so 2m distancing from others should be maintained wherever possible.

Visors (also referred to as face shields) are not a suitable alternative to face coverings. The primary purpose of wearing a close-fitting face covering is to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus from an infected person to others. Visors are considered less effective for the purpose of reducing transmission risk to others.

In contrast, visors are used principally and recommended to protect the wearer in close contact situations. For example, in 'one-to-one' support sessions or in administering first aid.

What if people do not want to wear one?

The new guidance on face coverings in schools has been introduced to protect everybody in our school community and your families. We all have that responsibility and it is a non-negotiable position unless you meet any of the 'exemption criteria'. If you are worried about wearing a face covering, please speak to a member of staff.



Will school staff be wearing face coverings?

The same advice about wearing face coverings when moving around corridors and when in communal areas in school applies to school staff. Students should also continue to ensure they are maintaining 2 metres physical distancing from staff.

Please note that some staff not wearing a face covering may also be exempt.

**Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language.**

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The emergence of this new variant is a serious development in the ongoing pandemic. We have already taken swift action on international travel, alongside the other UK governments.

We are now introducing an additional measure, while we learn more about this new strain. All staff and learners in our secondary schools, colleges and universities should now wear face coverings while indoors where physical distancing cannot be maintained. Many settings are already operating on this basis, guided by their local risk assessment, but this will now become a national approach. This is a temporary, precautionary measure that will be in place for the remaining weeks of term at which point the position will be reviewed. This should come into effect in all settings as soon as possible.

Alongside this national approach to face coverings, all education settings will continue to operate with the Local Infection Control Decision Framework and the toolkit which allows them to take measures that best suit their local circumstances.

Throughout the pandemic the Welsh Government's priority has been to maximise learning and to minimise disruption for our young people. With three weeks left of term, it is vital that we ensure that learning can continue for as many learners as possible.

There remains a lot we don't know about this new variant. With this high level of uncertainty, it is right that we remain cautious while prioritising the continuation of education. It reinforces the need for everyone in Wales to get their vaccine or booster when offered, wear face coverings when necessary, and book a test if they develop symptoms.

As is often the case during the pandemic, Ministerial decisions have been needed to be taken at pace. I will be writing to schools, colleges and universities tomorrow setting out this new guidance.

We will continue to monitor the situation and encourage anyone who is eligible to take up the offer of vaccination to do so. The JCVI today published their latest advice and, in line with the other nations of the UK, we will begin operationalising this advice as quickly and as safely as possible. Staff and secondary learners should also make full use of the offer of LFT testing and follow the latest public health advice.