

Face coverings in schools

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Hydref 2020
Petitions Committee | 13 October 2020

Reference: RS20/14123-1

Petition number: [P-05-1021](#)

Petition title: Do not make face masks or face coverings mandatory in ANY (inc secondary) schools

Text of petition: There is so much evidence to suggest face masks do not stop the spread of viruses including COVID-19/coronavirus.

Masks promote the touching of faces repeatedly which will spread any pathogens that are on the mask. On the topic of masks, Dr Jenny Harries is quoted in saying "Because of human behavioural issues, people can adversely put themselves at more risk than less."

Many doctors & health professionals are speaking out to say face masks aid the spread of viruses.



1. Summary

The Welsh Government revised its policy on face coverings in [schools on 26 August 2020](#), and face coverings in society more [generally on 11 September 2020](#).

Welsh Government guidance is updated regularly and Committee Members are advised to refer to the [latest versions available](#).

2. Face coverings in schools

The Welsh Government updated its policy on face coverings in [schools on 26 August 2020](#).

The Welsh Government said that, while [scientific advice](#) indicates that face coverings are likely to be of little value in children under the age of 11 years, they are **recommended for all members of the public aged over 11 in indoor settings in which social distancing cannot be maintained, including secondary schools**.

Face coverings are therefore recommended for use in communal areas (corridors etc but not necessarily classrooms) in secondary schools but not primary schools.

Welsh Government [operational guidance to schools](#) (updated 2 September) states:

The Chief Medical Officer recommends, but does not mandate, the risk assessed use of face coverings in secondary schools in a range of settings where other physical controls cannot be or are unlikely to be maintained. This may include communal areas of schools where the physical layout means that contact groups cannot remain separated to the same degree. This will be a local decision for the school or setting depending on their assessment of the risk and in context of the local circumstances.

The Minister was asked about face coverings in schools in Plenary on 15 September and said:

With regard to face coverings, the guidance is absolutely clear with regard to face coverings. Our expectations of schools and our operational guidance are that they will take steps within their school to limit contact between groups of students. And schools are doing this in a variety of ways: zoning, for instance; one-way systems; staggered starts; staggered break times, lunch times and end-of-school-day arrangements. Where, after all those other things have been done—because those things have to be done first—**where those things have all been done and then it is impossible to keep bubbles of students apart in communal areas, that's when face coverings should be worn. And it is best that that is done on an individual risk-assessment basis within an individual school, because our schools come in all different shapes and sizes.** There are high schools in my own constituency that would look like a small primary school in the context of Cardiff. We have some of our schools in wonderful twenty-first century schools buildings, and then some of our schools are still, if I'm honest, Victorian structures, so your ability to achieve these things within your school will vary from school to school. **If you cannot keep groups of students in communal areas 2m apart, then they should wear a face covering, and I'm sure that figuring that out is well within the capability of our headteachers who run our schools.** They are dealing with much more complex problems every single day of their lives than figuring out whether they can keep children 2m apart in a corridor. [Bold is Senedd Research emphasis]

3. Face coverings in society more generally

The Welsh Government announced on 11 September that, from 14 September, the wearing of face coverings is **required in all indoor public places**, such as shops and shopping centres, hairdressers and gyms. The exception to this requirement is where a person is inside a place to eat or drink (for example, cafés, restaurants and pubs).

Children aged under 11 are not required to wear face coverings. This is because the scientific advice indicates that face coverings are likely to be of little value in children under the age of 11 years.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.