



Department
for Education

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Sent by email

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Re: Wearing of Face Coverings/Masks in Schools and Colleges

Dear Karen

Thank you for writing to the Secretary of State to raise your concerns about the use of face coverings in schools and colleges. I am responding on his behalf.

The current advice from PHE remains that face coverings are not recommended in these settings – this has been confirmed to the Department since the policy on face coverings in shops was changed. They are not required in schools and colleges as pupils and staff are mixing in consistent groups, and because misuse may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission. There may also be negative effects on communication and, therefore, on education.

It is not feasible to expect younger children to wear face coverings and the risks of improper use outweigh any perceived benefit, and among older children there are risks that this will increase face touching, as well as the possibility that they will feel a false sense of security and so will be less likely to comply with other important rules, such as on hand cleaning and respiratory hygiene, which are crucial in reducing the risk of transmission.

While face coverings are recommended in shops and on public transport, where there are multiple potential contacts between unknown adults, education settings are very different. A school or college community is a far more controlled environment than a public space, with clearly defined rules and behavioural expectations, as well as consistent and limited contacts. For these reasons, PHE believes that the implementation of the system of controls based on a thorough risk assessment, as set out in the guidance for schools on a full return of pupils in the autumn term, is a sufficient and appropriate way to reduce risk in schools and other education and childcare settings.

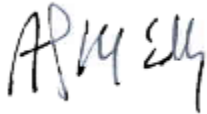
As part of this, consideration does need to be given to interactions between adult staff. It is important that protective measures are in place and followed in these circumstances, for example in the staff room. SAGE has previously

provided advice on redesigning shared spaces and activities to minimise interaction between people from different networks in the workplace.

Therefore, based on current evidence, PHE does not recommend the use of face coverings in schools, however they will continue to keep that evidence under review.

If staff wish to wear a face covering, we recommend school leaders discuss the individual's concerns and whether the circumstances are such that the individual should not be discouraged from wearing a face covering. It is important to remember that face coverings are largely intended to protect others, not the wearer.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'AMC' followed by a stylized flourish.

Andrew McCully