



FACE COVERINGS

Q. What has changed?

A. The DfE is no longer recommending for staff and pupils (Year 7 and above) to wear face coverings in classrooms although adults (staff and visitors) should continue to wear them in corridors and communal areas. Face coverings may also still be needed to be worn when social distancing cannot be maintained. Face coverings are different to face masks though and should not be used in their place.

Q. Will this change be reviewed in light of new variants and increased transmission rates?

A. Even though the DfE no longer recommends the wearing of face coverings, Head Teachers can continue to require for them to be worn if they so wish and especially in circumstances where rooms are small, or ventilation is not good. Additionally, Directors of Public Health in local areas could reinstate the wearing of face coverings in schools if local infection rates were to rise or if there was a worrying new variant.

Q. Does the requirement to no longer wear face coverings only apply in schools?

A. At the moment, yes. Pupils must continue to wear face coverings on school transport to secondary schools and all previous exemptions remain. GMB, along with other Trade Unions, Scientists & Public Health Professionals co-signed an open letter to Gavin Williamson on 4th May raising concerns with the lifting of the requirement for face coverings in schools, given the Government is not currently planning to lift face covering requirements in relation to shops or transport, where people generally spend less time in close contact with large groups.

Q. What is GMB doing?

A. On 13th May GMB, along with other Trade Unions, wrote to all Head Teachers, Local Authorities and MAT Leaders asking that schools use the flexibility within the new DfE guidance to actively encourage pupils and staff in secondary schools to continue wearing face coverings in classrooms and communal areas. The letter also set out the expectation of Trade Unions that nobody, whether staff or pupil, in any part of a primary or secondary school or college, should be prevented from wearing a face covering if they should wish to do so. The full letter can be seen **here**.



GMB is also supporting members who have concerns or issues about face coverings and all other Covid-19 matters and will continue, through Branches and Regional Organisers to monitor local situations and seek action from Local Authorities and Schools where necessary.

Q. What is GMBs' Advice?

A. GMBs' position is that the Government should stick to its original commitment to follow data, and not dates, when it comes to the lifting and easing of restrictions. As we have seen in the past week, there are new variants giving cause for concern and all the while there is still significant community transmission GMB maintains that face coverings, along with good ventilation and hygiene, remain key to the overall system of control measures in schools.

GMB believes that it is reasonable for members of staff to choose to continue wearing a face covering and should be allowed to do so. The advice from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is if staff choose to wear face coverings, employers should support this and GMB hopes Head Teachers will take this HSE advice on board. If you have any problem in this regard, please contact your local branch for help and support or email schoolsteamlondon@gmb.org.uk.

GMB London would like to remind all members that it is as important as ever to make sure you have access to and are using the correct PPE when it is needed. Face coverings do not protect the wearer and that is why for close contact with pupils (including with those who may spit or cough) or when administering first aid PPE should be provided as identified in a risk assessment. Although the DfE only cites a few examples of when it believes PPE will be necessary e.g., if a pupil develops symptoms of Covid-19 and a 2 metre distance cannot be obtained, if you believe you are carrying out an activity that puts you at risk this should raise this with your Head Teacher. Risk assessments are live documents which means they should be updated regularly to include any changes.

All previous advice from GMB London is available at www.gmblondon.org.uk/workplace.

