



Guide to wearing face coverings

The government advises that everyone over the age of 5 should wear a face covering when it is not possible for people to physically distance from one another (for example in busy or crowded places indoors or outside).

From the 22nd of June, the Scottish Government made the wearing of face coverings mandatory on all public transport. This includes buses, taxis, trains, ferries, trams, subways, stations and airports.

From the 10th of July, wearing face coverings is mandatory in shops.

From the 7th of August, Face shields and visors may be used, but only if they are worn with a face covering underneath, in order to provide enough protection.

If you are unable to wear a face covering, a face visor or shield can be worn to provide a limited level of protection.

From the 7th of August, mandatory use of face coverings also includes most public indoor settings, except places where you eat and drink (e.g. pubs, cafes and restaurants). [Here](#) is the latest list of settings where you must wear a face covering. *To be on the safe side, we suggest that if you are in any indoor public setting you should use a face covering unless you are exempt or eating or drinking.*

However, some people, including autistic people, find wearing a face covering distressing or difficult. If this is the case for you, then the Scottish Government says you do not need to wear one. The reasons they say someone may not be able to wear a face covering include:

*'(If) it would cause difficulty, pain or severe distress or anxiety or because it cannot be worn in the proper manner safely.'**

If you cannot wear a face covering you may be concerned that you may not be allowed on public transport or in shops without one. These cards may help you to communicate that you are autistic and that you cannot wear a face covering:

[Autism Alert card – Covid-19](#) - for busy places and public transport
[First Bus "Please Be Supportive" card](#) - for public transport only

Why might an autistic person find wearing a face covering distressing or difficult?

- Being able to see the top of the face covering when wearing it may be distracting or disorientating and affect their vision.
- The face can be more sensitive to touch than other areas of the body, and some autistic people are hypersensitive to touch.
- The feeling of straps around the ear or head may scratch, tickle, or cause other distressing sensations.
- A face covering may trap unpleasant heat, smells and humidity from the person's breath.
- A person may use their face for stimming, and a mask may make this difficult and unhygienic.
- They may never have been asked to wear one before, and this change can be confusing and difficult to process.
- It may be harder for them to communicate by speaking or using their facial expressions (like smiling or grimacing).

It might also be harder to communicate with other people who are wearing face coverings for a number of reasons:

- Being unable to see their mouth moving when they speak.
- It may be hard to hear their voice properly.
- It may be distracting seeing their face covering.
- Being unable to see their facial expression properly so it may be harder to understand their feelings and what they mean.

If it is hard for you to understand someone communicating through a face covering, you may need to ask the person to help you by communicating differently. Maybe the person could:

- Speak more loudly
- Speak more clearly
- Speak more slowly
- Write down information for you
- Show you what you need to know by pointing or using pictures or photographs

You may want to show them your [Autism Alert card – Covid-19](#) and any communication supports you use, like a Communication Passport, so that they understand how to communicate with you more clearly.

What if I want to wear a face covering but find it difficult?

You may wish to wear a face covering because you want to follow the rules, or you want to protect others and yourself from Covid-19.

Here are some things to consider:

- **Do you have an item of clothing at home already that you could use as a face covering?**

You may have items of clothing at home which you could use as a face covering, such as a scarf or winter neck warmer. You should not be able to see through the fabric that you choose. An item that you are familiar with may provide you with more comfort.

- **Consider personalisation of a face covering**

Face coverings can be purchased or made at home. You can choose one that you like. This may be for sensory/comfort reasons; size and shape and/or visual appeal (e.g. made with favourite decorated fabric, designing your own).

- **Practice wearing one in a comfortable environment**

Practice at home, or in a safe outdoor space. This can help you identify whether you will feel comfortable enough to wear one in public, or if there is a part of the mask that is bothering you. You may either need to refine the fabric or try a different type of face covering.

- **What to do if it becomes too stressful?**

Remember that if wearing a face cover causes you distress, you may need to consider not wearing one.

Wearing and disposing of a covering safely

It is important to ensure that if you are wearing a face covering, that steps are taken to ensure that it is being worn and handled safely.

You can follow this routine:

1. Washing hands prior to putting on the covering and removing it.
2. Washing or sanitising hands if touching it.
3. Do not remove it by touching the area that covers the face (mouth, nose, cheeks). Use the straps at the side, or if it does not have straps, use the side of the fabric that covers the ears or neck.
4. If it is a disposable covering, put it in a bin (or a plastic bag until you get to a bin) then wash or sanitise your hands.
5. If using a reusable face covering to wash this at 60 degrees after use.
6. Placing it into a plastic bag without touching the area that covers the face.

7. Store face covering away until you need to use it next time.

This document was updated on the 12th of August, 2020. This information has been written as clearly as possible for a wide readership. If you require support with this information then please make contact with our [Autism Support Team](#).