



## About Face Coverings

Face coverings are made of cloth of varying layers and different materials such as cotton, they are primarily intended to help contain the wearer’s respiratory droplets from being spread. A face covering helps contain small droplets that come out of your mouth and/or nose when you talk, sneeze or cough, and are particularly useful if you have Covid-19 and are not showing symptoms.

The nose and mouth are two of the primary sources of Covid-19 transmission between individuals, and face coverings allow the wearer to breathe while creating a buffer to reduce the distance that ejected viral droplets can travel. Face coverings are designed primarily to protect those around us, however studies show they can also protect the wearer. They can be reusable or single-use and are produced in a range of styles and materials.

## Types:

**FFP3**



**Surgical Mask**



**Face Covering**



**Visor**



**The FFP3 mask** illustrated has an official protection factor, which identifies how much and the size of particles that it can prevent entering the respiratory tract. It is also CE marked and classified as PPE, specifically RPE (Respiratory Protective equipment). Tests show these masks reduce the exposure by up to six times compared to a surgical masks

**Surgical face masks** are primarily intended to protect patients, and as such are classed as medical devices. They are designed to limit contact of large droplets and bodily fluid, must meet a specific standard, and are CE marked. The above is type 2 fluid resistant.

**Cloth face coverings** are not CE marked and are not required to meet any standard however the World Health Organisation (WHO) has issued guidance which sets a standard. Unite’s position is that when they are used in the workplace, they should be subject to risk assessment, reach - as a minimum - the WHO standard and paid for and provided by the employer.

**Visors/shields** are not generally considered face coverings as they do not provide adequate protection. They could be worn in addition to a mask but not instead. In circumstances someone is exempt from wearing a mask but able to wear a visor, it is advisable to do so.

Information about differences between surgical face masks, PPE, and face coverings, see: [Regulatory status of equipment being used to help prevent coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#).

## NOTES FOR REPS

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- Face coverings are not the same as face masks and are not CE marked.
- Unite recommends face coverings made to World Health Organisation standards
- HSE does not enforce or regulate use of face masks, this is undertaken by the police.
- **Have 3 layers but ensure the finished product is breathable, constructed of:**
  - Outer layer of hydrophobic material (fluid resistant) such as polypropylene, polyester, or their blends.
  - Middle hydrophobic layer of synthetic non-woven material such as polypropylene
  - Inner layer of a hydrophilic material such as cotton or cotton blends

### When to wear a face covering

- Mandatory on public transport, shops most public indoor places and hospitals.
- See the following links for the latest information in [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#) & [Republic of Ireland](#).
- This is in line with new World Health Organisation (WHO) advice that states non-medical face coverings should be worn in public.
- **Face coverings are now being legally mandated gradually in certain workplaces and areas across the UK.** 3 layer face coverings mandatory on public transport in Wales
- **In absence of legislation some employers are choosing to mandate face coverings**
- **Where a risk assessment identifies the use of face coverings in workplaces, communal areas for example, they must be supplied and paid for by employers to WHO standard and must be worn collectively in those areas to be effective.**

### **Breaks**

Where workers are required to use face coverings for long periods, their working hours should reflect the discomfort and fatigue issues associated with this. Employers should factor in breaks to allow workers time away from the workplace without a mask.

### **Exemptions**

Some people are exempt from the wearing of face coverings, and the duty to implement a number of those exemptions will be covered under equalities' legislation. In brief:

- People who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability.
- People speaking to or assisting someone who relies on lip-reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate.
- Those exempt do not need evidence, however you can print an [exemption card](#).
- It is important to recognise that workers dealing with the public, should not be put in a position to enforce face covering use or to police exemptions.

# HOW TO WEAR A NON-MEDICAL FABRIC FACE COVERING SAFELY



Clean your hands before touching the mask



Inspect the mask for damage or dirt



Adjust the mask to your face without leaving gaps on the sides



Cover your mouth and chin, ensure you are breathing through the mask ok



Avoid touching the mask



Clean your hands before removing the mask



Remove the mask by the straps behind the ears or head



Pull the mask away from your face



Store the mask in a clean plastic, resealable bag if it is not dirty or wet and you plan to re-use it. **If not retain in bag and dispose of responsibly\***



Remove the mask by the straps when taking it out of the bag



Wash the mask in soap or detergent, preferably with hot water, at least once a day



Clean your hands after removing the mask

A fabric mask can protect others around you. To protect yourself and prevent the spread of COVID-19, remember to socially distance from others, clean your hands frequently and thoroughly, avoid touching your face and mask. Do not wear around head, neck or chin even when eating or drinking.

Based on WHO advice

\*See Government advice on disposal: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-disposing-of-waste>