

Updated Position Statement on Face Coverings and Visors -

1. Recommendation

It is recommended that the University adopts the mandatory use of face coverings in all teaching rooms, resource areas and communal spaces **immediately**. The below environments will be exempt from this requirement:

- Student accommodation (except for staff, who will be required to wear a face covering at all times)
- Sports facilities that are being used for exercise, e.g. The Sports Dome. However, if the facility is being used for teaching or exam purposes face coverings must be worn.
- Catering and restaurant facilities
 - Larger and well-ventilated offices (where there is an omission of a mandatory face covering sign on the entrance door)
- Meeting rooms where a person is the **only** occupant
- External environments

Staff and students will be expected to provide their own face covering but disposable face coverings will also be available to purchase from the University shop and catering outlets.

Position changes to Face visors

From immediate effect; the University will no longer support the wearing of face visors as an alternative to face coverings, including student facing or front of house roles.

The University will adopt the latest DfE advice that recommends that face visors should only be worn in conjunction **with** a suitable face covering. This means that staff who have previously been issued with face visors will no longer be required to wear them if they are using a suitable face covering unless they prefer to, or it forms part of essential PPE for their role.

The only exceptional circumstances for wearing a face visor at the University without a face covering include:

- A person who is required to speak to someone who relies on lipreading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate
- A person who qualifies for an exception lanyard, and wishes to wear a face visor by choice
- Other exceptional circumstances at the Universities discretion where a suitable and sufficient risk assessment has been carried out for the specific situation.

2. Author and Contact Information

Becky Bradshaw, Director of Estates & Campus Services

E-mail: becky.bradshaw@northampton.ac.uk

Direct Line: 01604 893566

3. Definitions

There is a wide selection of personal protective equipment (PPE) used to control the transmission of infectious diseases. This ranges from sophisticated full-face respirators to simple disposable fluid-repellent medical masks to a simple medical face mask covers the nose, mouth and chin. They prevent droplets from reaching these parts of the wearers face and reduce the spread of infectious droplets from the person wearing it. All types of medical face masks are designed to meet quality standards.

Face Masks and Respirators or Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE)

Masks

- Masks are loose fitting, covering the nose and mouth
- Designed for one-way protection, to capture bodily fluid leaving the wearer
- Example – worn during surgery to prevent coughing, sneezing, etc. on the vulnerable patient
- Contrary to belief, masks are NOT designed to protect the wearer
- The vast majority of masks do not have a safety rating assigned to them (e.g. NIOSH or EN)

Respirators or RPE

- Respirators are tight fitting masks, designed to create a facial seal
- Non-valved respirators provide good two-way protection, by filtering both inflow and outflow of air
- These are designed to protect the wearer (when worn properly), up to the safety rating of the mask
- Available as disposable, half face or full face
- They have safety rating and EN number

Face Coverings

A facial covering of the mouth and nose, that is made of cloth or other textiles and through which you can breathe, it may be home made and could include a scarf. It **is not** a surgical mask or medical grade mask.

Face coverings are largely intended to protect others, not the wearer, against the spread of infection because they cover the nose and mouth, which are the main confirmed sources of transmission of virus that causes coronavirus infection (COVID-19).

4. Background

The use and effectiveness of face coverings has been debated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and despite originally disputing their benefit the UK government introduced their use in specific environmental settings on the 14th July 2020¹.

The University has followed the government position to date through the introduction of mandatory use on public transport and in shops but has also committed to taking account of scientific evidence as it emerges.

5. Regulation and Attitude towards Face Coverings

In England, you must wear a face covering by law in the following settings:

- public transport

¹ Cabinet Office. (2020). *Face coverings: when to wear one and how to make your own*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

- indoor transport hubs (airports, rail and tram stations and terminals, maritime ports and terminals, bus and coach stations and terminals)
- shops and supermarkets (places which are open to the public and that wholly or mainly offer goods or services for retail sale or hire)
- indoor shopping centres
- banks, building societies, and post offices (including credit unions, short-term loan providers, savings clubs and money service businesses)

Face coverings are also needed in NHS settings, including hospitals and primary or community care settings, such as GP surgeries.

Individuals are also strongly encouraged to wear a face covering in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing may be difficult or where you come into contact with people you do not normally meet. Whilst Universities are not included within the prescribed settings it is easy to see how our buildings could come within this definition.

In addition, the attitude of students and staff towards the mandatory use of face coverings, is changing. A recent survey² of student attitudes to studying on campus in the Autumn identified that 7 out of 10 students want to wear face coverings in teaching environments and 8 out of 10 students expect their lecturers or tutors to be wearing personal protective equipment. Furthermore, 6 out of 10 students reported that they would want to use face coverings in communal areas such as libraries, seminar spaces and common rooms.

There was also a great deal of support for face coverings from University colleagues who participated in the Covid-19: Return to Work, virtual town hall series.

6. Teaching Rooms

Teaching room capacities have so far been calculated in accordance with the original Covid Secure guidelines which stipulated distance of 2 metres between people, in most settings. This guidance was updated³ on the 26th June to allow the distance to be reduced from 2m to 1m conditional on the introduction of additional risk mitigation measures such as face coverings, increasing ventilation and undertaking activities outside.

Introducing the mandatory use of face coverings in teaching locations would enable the University to increase capacity in a number of these environments, thereby offering a potential uplift to the number of face to face contact hours that can be delivered to students without compromising student or staff safety.

It is acknowledged that some students may find it difficult to understand staff if they are wearing a face covering, especially if they are hearing impaired, however clear visors could be provided for use by academic colleagues and staff in front facing roles.

² Eleana Davidson 2020, 'Students are in favour of PPE – but what does it mean for the University experience?', *Student Hut*, 29 July 2020, Accessed 30 July 2020.

³ Cabinet Office. (2020). *Review of two metre social distancing guidance*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-two-metre-social-distancing-guidance/review-of-two-metre-social-distancing-guidance>

7. Exemptions

It is recommended that the University adopts the government approach for face coverings and the circumstances in which an individual does not need to wear one. This includes (but is not limited to):

- young children under the age of 11 (Public Health England do not recommend face coverings for children under the age of 3 for health and safety reasons)
- not being able to put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability
- if putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause you severe distress
- if you are travelling with or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading to communicate
- to avoid harm or injury, or the risk of harm or injury, to yourself or others
- to avoid injury, or to escape a risk of harm, and you do not have a face covering with you
- to eat or drink if reasonably necessary
- in order to take medication
- if a police officer or other official requests you remove your face covering