Face coverings in Primary schools

NPHET has recommended the wearing of face masks/coverings by children aged nine years and above on public transport, in retail and other indoor public settings as already required for children aged 13 years and over. They have also recommended that this is introduced for children in 3rd class and above in primary schools. They have advised that this measure is being introduced on a temporary basis and is subject to review in mid-February 2022.

Guidance on face masks/coverings in Primary schools

Wearing a face covering or mask does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.

Wearing of face masks/coverings
Pupils from third class and up in primary schools are required to wear a face mask/covering. The exemptions to this are set out below.

Face masks/coverings
Face masks/coverings act as a barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from travelling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the face mask/covering coughs, sneezes, talks or raises their voice. Face masks/coverings are therefore intended to prevent transmission of the virus from the wearer (who may not know that they are infected) to those with whom they come into close contact.

Face masks/coverings must not contain any slogans/logos/images that may cause upset or be deemed offensive to any member of the school community.

Visors
Face masks/coverings are more effective than visors. In the limited circumstances where a face mask/covering cannot be worn clear visors must be considered.

Exemptions
A medical certificate to certify that a person falls into a category listed below must be provided to the school on behalf of, any person (pupil) who claims that they are covered by the exemptions below:

- any pupil with difficulty breathing or other relevant medical conditions
- any pupil who is unable to remove the cloth face-covering or visor without assistance
- any pupil who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the cloth face covering or visor, for example pupils with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

Schools will be best placed to identify those children whose complex needs are such that the wearing of face covering may not be possible for them, and to discuss this with parents as required. In such circumstances a school may not require medical certification to provide an exemption to the wearing of face coverings. In other circumstances where a medical certificate is not provided that person (staff or pupil) will be refused entry to the school.

Directions for effective use of face masks/coverings

- Information should be provided by schools on the proper use, removal, and washing of face coverings. Advice on how to use face coverings properly can be found here.

- All pupils should be reminded not to touch the face covering and to wash or sanitise their hands (using hand sanitiser) before putting on and after taking off the face covering.
- Face masks/coverings should be stored in a designated space, for example, in an individually labelled container or bag.
- Cloth face coverings should be washed after every day of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled.
- Face masks/coverings should not be worn if they are wet. A wet cloth face covering may make it difficult to breathe.

Pupils using school transport
Pupils from 3rd class and up on the primary transport scheme are required to wear face masks/coverings subject to the exemptions above.

Mixed classes in single rooms
Where there are mixed classes, e.g. 2nd and 3rd class in a single classroom, schools should note that only children in 3rd class and above, are required to wear face masks. As per previous advice, however, parents of other children who would prefer that their children wear a face mask are not precluded from doing this.

Provision of face masks
Parents should be advised that they obtain face masks for their children which fit properly and are comfortable for the child to wear. In the event that a child forgets, loses or damages their masks during the course of the school day, then the school should have a sufficient supply to replace the mask for the child in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day or where required on an ongoing basis.