

Keeping safe beyond Omicron

 Health Partners Health Update



It's all a bit confusing...

COVID-19 rules are changing in some UK nations, but not in others. You must wear a face covering/mask in some settings, but you don't have to in others. Let's see if we can help.

England: you must wear a face covering/mask:

- In health and care settings to comply with infection prevention and control and adult social care guidance. This includes hospitals and primary or community care settings, such as GP surgeries. They must also be worn by everyone accessing or visiting care homes
- On public transport in London, including the Tube, and passengers can be refused entry or told to leave for not complying.

There are some circumstances where people may not be able to wear a face covering/mask and they may hold an exemption card to counter the above requirement.

However, major retailers including Tesco, Sainsburys, Lidl, Waitrose and John Lewis have asked staff and customers to keep wearing a face covering/mask and the government recommends that people wear face covering/mask in enclosed or private spaces where they are mixing with people they do not know.

Scotland: you must wear a face covering/mask:

- In most indoor public spaces including public transport, shops and gyms (although they can be temporarily removed when exercising)
- In pubs and restaurants when not seated or dancing and in the workplace in communal areas and canteens

In indoor public spaces in universities. They are compulsory for all school staff as well as secondary school pupils. However, pupils will no longer have to wear them in class from 28 February. Under-12s are exempt.

Northern Ireland: you must wear a face covering/mask:

- If you are a post-primary pupil inside school buildings, as must staff if they can't socially distance
- On public transport, in shops and hospitality venues unless you're sitting down to eat or drink.
- However, people no longer have to show proof of exemption if they're not wearing a mask

Under-13s don't have to wear masks in public indoor places, and primary school pupils are exempt from the rules on public transport.

Wales: you must wear a face covering/mask:

- On public transport and most public spaces, including shops
 - Secondary school pupils are being asked to wear masks in class until the end of half term
- This guidance applies to everyone aged 11 or over.

What sort of face covering/mask is best?

It should:

- Have a nose wire
- Have at least two or three layers of material
- Fit snugly over mouth, nose and chin.

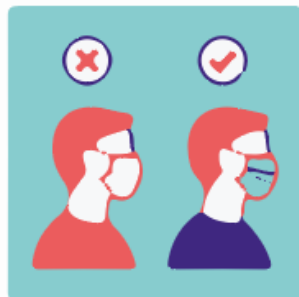
Make sure your nose is always covered.

Standard surgical masks are acceptable. It is also possible to buy FFP2 and FFP3 masks used by some healthcare workers and in industry, which can offer higher protection. However, these protect more effectively where they have been 'face fit' tested.

How to wear a surgical mask correctly:



Wash your hands before wearing a mask



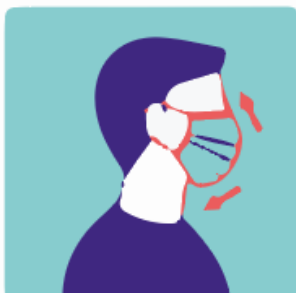
Make sure the proper side faces outwards



Locate the metallic strip & place on nose bridge



Secure strings behind head or over your ears



Cover mouth & nose fully making sure there are no gaps



Press metallic strip to fit nose shape



Remove mask from behind holding strings with clean hands



Dispose of mask in closed bin without touching front



Surgical mask placed correctly



Don't touch mask while using. If you do, wash your hands



Replace mask if damp & do not reuse

What if I want to continue wearing a mask/face covering beyond requirements?

With new vaccines, new treatments and a better understanding of how COVID-19 spreads, the risk of being seriously unwell is lowering; however, COVID-19 continues to circulate. Many people will choose to wear a mask/face covering and have every right to decide.

Other steps to take that may help keep you safe:

- Make sure you are fully vaccinated (including the booster). The main aim of vaccines is to lower hospital admissions and death, two great reasons to get the jab
- Continue social distancing if you feel unsafe
- Ask friends/family to take a lateral flow test before meeting up, especially if there is somebody in your group who is more vulnerable
- Ask visitors to wear masks
- Avoid enclosed, crowded places.

Speak to your OH provider or GP over health concerns, or your Employee Assistance Programme or the Samaritans if you have mental health concerns. It is only natural that you feel concern after the last two years' of COVID-19. However, it is important to take the steps you need to feel safe.

