

Extracts Relevant to Face Covering Exemptions

Introduction:

On 7th August, 2020, the Department of Education issued an update on the [Roadmap for the Full Return to School](#) as follows:

[Updated Guidance around wearing of Face Coverings](#)

The Minister also confirmed that she had been working with the public health authorities to ensure that the public health advice underpinning the safe reopening of schools is fully up to date. The HSE's Health Protection Surveillance Centre has confirmed that all recommendations published in the public health advice by the Minister at the beginning of July including physical distancing guidelines as set out in the recently published roadmap still apply in all schools, with the exception of the recommendations on face coverings which has been updated to reflect the latest research and expertise. It is now recommended that teachers and secondary school students wear face coverings, similar to those worn in shops or on public transport, when a physical distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained.

The following extracts from the original document directly contradict the updated recommendation:

- *Apply Common-Sense*

“An atmosphere of fear and an overwhelming preoccupation with infection and hygiene can be harmful to teachers and pupils and to the quality of the educational experience without materially reducing the risk of infection beyond what can be achieved with a common-sense approach” (page 7)

In terms of maintaining physical distancing, measures outlined in the Public Health Advice fall into two broad categories:

- (i) *Increasing separation;*
- (ii) *Decreasing interaction between students themselves, between students and staff and between staff when they are together; It also recognises that: • the implementation of physical distancing will look different across the various ages and stages of learning; • care should be taken to avoid generating tension or potential conflict and some flexibility in the implementation of measures may be required at times; and • staff will not always be able to maintain physical distance from their students and it is not appropriate that they would be expected to do so where this could have a detrimental impact on the student or the learning and health and safety of other students. (Page 13)*

These suite of measures provides a practical framework for schools to use to maintain physical distancing in the classroom with the full return of all students for the 2020/21 school year. In exceptional circumstances, where notwithstanding the application of these measures, physical distancing by organisational means for a larger class proves not to be possible, then

the school must consider the use of face covering/visors in that larger class. This exceptional measure should be kept continually under review by the school, who should continue to make every effort to devise an alternative solution using the measures set out at 1 to 6 above. Staff or students who cannot wear face coverings or visors for health reasons should be based in other classrooms or areas wherever possible. Students should not be required to wear face coverings or visors for the duration of the whole school day. (Page 16)

Use of Face Coverings/Masks within Schools On the use of face coverings/masks in schools, the Public Health Advice states that:

“Non-medical masks may reduce transmission from individuals who are shedding the virus. However, the extent of this benefit is unknown (especially in children) and would only be potentially beneficial if done properly. It is not practical for many students to wear a mask properly for the duration of a school day. Cloth face coverings are not suitable for children under the age of 13 and anyone who:

- has trouble breathing*
- is unconscious or incapacitated*
- is unable to remove it without help*
- has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering*

Older students should not be requested to wear a facial covering but those who may wish to wear a facial covering where physical distancing is difficult to maintain should not be discouraged. It is essential that those wearing a cloth face covering understand

- The purpose is not to protect themselves but to reduce onward transmission and the benefit is reliant on ensuring the mask is worn appropriately see guidance on mask wearing*

- Wearing a face covering or mask does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.*
- It is not a teachers responsibility to enforce mask use by pupils.*

In line with the Public Health Advice, the use of face coverings/masks by pupils in primary schools by pupils should not occur. In post primary schools, the use of face coverings/masks by students may be a feature where:

- The student themselves wishes to wear a facial covering in circumstances where physical distancing is difficult to maintain within the school; and/or*

- In the exceptional circumstances, where notwithstanding the application of the measures in the Framework to maintain Physical Distancing in the Classroom in Post Primary Schools with a full return of all Students for the 2020/21 School Year, physical distancing by organisational means for a larger class proves not to be possible. (Page 18)*