



29th August 2020

Dear Students and Parents,

School statement on face coverings in school settings and school transport

The Welsh Government decided last week that local authorities and individual schools should be responsible for decisions about the use of face coverings. The timing of the WG announcement is not at all ideal but we must respond.

Elected Members and senior officers of NPTCBC have reviewed the position urgently to offer as clear guidance as possible within the law.

I can now tell you that **all secondary school students travelling on home-to-school transport provided by NPTCBC must wear face coverings**. This follows the practice currently in place on public transport. The Council is proposing to source appropriate, reusable face coverings and will arrange for their distribution to students via the school. For those who rely on **school transport provided by the school, the same practice will apply** and the school will source and distribute the appropriate face coverings.

In the school setting, the position is more complex. First of all, the council does not believe that it is possible, in the short time available, for schools to fully risk assess all circumstances in every school setting prior to the start of term. The announcement on face coverings came too late for that. In any event, the Welsh Government has subsequently stated that a full risk assessment is not required by Tuesday, 1st September and it is also the case that schools do not become fully operational until Monday, 14th September. This time thus provides an opportunity to complete preparations.

Until we complete a substantive assessment, the advice from the council is that on balance, the safe and cautious approach is **to recommend the wearing of face coverings in communal areas** until schools have gained further assurance through the completion of the risk assessment process in relation to face coverings.

Accordingly, I **would advise that students wear face coverings in communal areas** when they return to school. Please note that 'communal areas' refers only to those areas where our control measures are not able to ensure that students have contact only with other students in their respective contact groups or 'bubbles'. As such, there is no recommendation for students to wear face coverings in the classroom or during break or lunch. At these times students are organised in their respective contact groups and supervised. Moreover, face coverings are not advised when eating and drinking.

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Although the arrangements we have set up in school are designed to maintain a separation of the different contact groups, there are a few occasions when students could have wider contact. These include:

- Entry onto the school site in the morning and exit from the school site in the afternoon (although contact groups will be directed to different entry and exit points);
- Movement through corridors (though our arrangements for contact group zones and corridor movement will significantly limit contact of students from different year groups);
- Use of toilet facilities shared by students in KS3 and KS4 (though there will be restrictions (supervised) on the number of pupils permitted to use the toilets at any one time). Sixth formers will use separate toilet facilities.

I do have to add that the recommendation to wear face coverings in communal areas is advisory only and cannot be insisted upon or enforced. It relies wholly upon the cooperation of parents and pupils. It is also the case that some students are exempt from wearing face coverings.

I should also add that no limitations will be placed on students who choose to wear face coverings in contexts beyond what I have recommended. Students may wear face coverings throughout the school day if they so choose.

However, there are clear expectations and procedures in relation to the use of face coverings that are fundamental to good hygiene. The operational guidance published by the Welsh Government states the following:

Learners must be instructed not to touch the front of their face covering during use or when removing them. They must wash their hands immediately on arrival (as is the case for all learners), dispose of temporary face coverings in a covered bin or place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag they can take home with them, and then wash their hands again before heading to their classroom. (p.13)

Please note that face coverings are not the same as face masks. The technical advice published on 25th August states:

Face coverings are not face masks. Face masks are CE or kite marked personal protective equipment that protect the wearer and others from exposure, face coverings can be home-made or purchased, are not CE or kit marked and generally protect others from exposure, rather than the wearer.

Accordingly, it is important to remember that physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene (catching a cough or sneeze in a tissue or covering the mouth and nose with an elbow or sleeve) remain strongly evidenced to be the most effective ways to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

I hope this provides some clarity for you as we begin to open our school to all students.

Yours faithfully,

