

Face coverings policy

Last Updated 13.08.20

A. Introduction

Staff, students, visitors, contractors, and members of the public will be required to use face coverings across all university and college buildings as set out in this policy. This is out of consideration for those around us. A face covering is typically a cloth covering for the nose and mouth. See note below of exemptions for individuals.

Social distancing at 2m remains a key feature of the hygiene and safety measures that the University has in place. Face coverings are not a substitute for this and other hygiene and safety measures, such as being tested when displaying symptoms, self-isolating when unwell or advised to, enhanced cleaning regimes, and regular hand-washing. These primary mitigation measures should always be followed¹.

However, there is increasing evidence that wearing face coverings can reduce transmission of coronavirus from an infected person to others. Therefore, the wearing of face coverings is to be considered a social responsibility for those members of the collegiate University who can wear them, with the aim of providing increased reassurance to all members, including those most vulnerable to serious illness.

All members of the collegiate University (and visitors) who are not exempt should have a clean face covering readily available. They should put on the face covering before entering a University or college building, and continue to wear it in the required settings identified in section C below. Exemptions for individuals and exceptions for particular settings are set out below in sections B and C.

This policy will come into effect on 7 September 2020, although departments and colleges may wish to adopt the policy sooner than that. The policy will be kept under regular review by the Silver group of the University's Crisis Management Framework.

B. Exemptions

The requirement to wear face coverings will not apply to those who have a legitimate reason² including:

- 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 severe distress
- Where interacting with someone who uses lip reading to communicate, or who has social communication impairments
- Children aged under 11 years (e.g. when in public spaces such as museums)

¹ See the Return to Onsite Working Guidance at <https://unioxfordnexus.sharepoint.com/sites/rtosw>.

² No medical certificate or explanation of grounds for exemption will be required. The decision that someone has a condition that exempts them from wearing a face covering is for that person to make.

C. Required settings for wearing face coverings

Settings where face coverings required <i>(unless the individual is exempt)</i> Social distancing must be maintained at all times	Exceptions
In-person teaching settings (tutorials, seminars, classes, viva examinations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to exemptions outlined in B above
Shared research laboratory spaces and workshops , and teaching laboratories/practical classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to exemptions outlined in B above • Where existing University policy or risk assessment requires the use of specified respiratory protection as a control measure for other hazards
Office spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When alone in single occupancy offices • When seated at a desk in shared space if face to face interaction is minimised (and 2m social distancing is consistently maintained)
Meeting rooms and spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to exemptions outlined in B above
Common indoor areas (such as toilets, kitchens, post rooms, social areas, etc) and circulation space (such as corridors, hallways, lifts, stairwells, etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When eating and drinking in catering outlets (or dedicated communal areas for eating and drinking) while 2m social distancing and/or other mitigations are consistently maintained • Staff working in areas with protective screens in place such as reception • In student accommodation where students are living in defined household groups (Individuals may still choose to wear a face covering where appropriate)
Public and circulation spaces (including bookstacks) inside libraries and museums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local guidance will apply, in line with government guidance.
University or college-owned (or hired) vehicles with more than one occupant	
In any other settings required by current legislation	

Local policy in hospital buildings requires that surgical masks (i.e. not ‘face coverings’) will be worn (in line with government guidance).

In addition, local building and facilities policies, to be determined in line with government and sector guidance, may apply in certain settings such as:

- clinical settings
- sports and fitness facilities
- for performing arts
- front-of-house staff (e.g. reception, Porters’ Lodge) who are working behind a protective screen

If asked to remove a face covering by someone who needs to see a face to aid their communication, individuals should do so, so long as 2m social distancing can be maintained.

Face masks

Where a specific need for a face mask (i.e. not a ‘face covering’) as an item of PPE has been identified through risk assessment, or a surgical mask is required in hospital buildings³, appropriate masks will be provided by departments and colleges. Further information is provided in the [Return to On-site Working guidance](#).

D. Type of face covering

A face covering should⁴:

- cover your nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably
- fit comfortably but securely against the side of the face
- be secured to the head with ties or ear loops
- be made of a material that you find to be comfortable and breathable, such as cotton
- ideally include at least two layers of fabric (the World Health Organisation recommends three depending on the fabric used). The face covering may include a clear panel to allow for lip reading.
- unless disposable, it should be able to be washed with other items of laundry according to fabric washing instructions and dried without causing the face covering to be damaged

E. Care and Maintenance

Proper use, care, and maintenance of face coverings are the responsibility of each member of the collegiate University.

When wearing a face covering you should:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on

³ A face **mask** is a form of personal protective equipment (PPE), such as a fluid-resistant surgical mask, typically used in healthcare settings. A face **covering** is not a form of PPE and is typically a cloth covering for the nose and mouth.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

- avoid wearing on your neck or forehead
- avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could become contaminated with the virus
- change the face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it

When removing a face covering:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing
- only handle the straps, ties or clips
- do not share with someone else to use
- if single-use, dispose of it carefully in a residual waste bin and do not recycle
- if reusable, store it in a plastic bag and wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed

F. Policy adherence

Members of the collegiate University who are not exempt from wearing face coverings are expected to follow this policy.

FACE COVERING POLICY FAQs

1. Why are the University and Colleges requiring the wearing of face coverings?

The introduction of the face covering policy is informed by advice from senior clinicians and public health experts at the University. There is increasing evidence that wearing face coverings can reduce transmission of coronavirus from an infected person to others since they cover the nose and mouth, which are the main confirmed sources of transmission of virus that causes coronavirus infection.

The wearing of face coverings is to be considered a social responsibility for members of the collegiate University who can wear them, with the aim of reducing risk and providing increased reassurance to all, including those most vulnerable to serious illness.

Face coverings are not a substitute for hygiene and safety measures such as being tested when displaying symptoms, self-isolating when unwell or advised to, social distancing, enhanced cleaning regimes, and regular hand-washing, and these primary mitigation measures should always be followed.

2. Who does the policy apply to?

The policy applies to all staff, students, visitors, contractors, and members of the public across all University and College buildings, except those who are exempt from wearing face coverings (see below).

3. Are there any exemptions to who needs to wear a face covering?

In line with the exemptions that apply in public spaces such as on public transport and in shops, the requirement to wear face coverings in University and College buildings will not apply to those who have a legitimate reason. This includes:

- 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 severe distress
- Where interacting with someone who uses lip reading to communicate, or who has social communication impairments
- Children aged under 11 years (e.g. when in public spaces such as museums)

4. Do I need to provide evidence that I am exempt from wearing a face covering?

There is no requirement to provide evidence that you have a legitimate reason not to wear a face covering, or that you may require others to briefly remove theirs so that you can understand them (e.g. to lip read). Some people may feel more comfortable showing something that says they do not have to wear a face covering. This could be in the form of an exemption card, badge or even a home-made sign (some examples are shown on the [Government COVID-19 pages](#)). This is a personal choice, and is not required.

It is not appropriate to challenge someone who is not wearing a face covering. It should be assumed that there is a legitimate reason why they cannot.

5. Where will I be required to wear a face covering?

Face coverings must be worn (except by those who are exempt) when entering University and College buildings and in all shared indoor spaces. This includes in-person teaching settings, communal and circulation spaces, offices, meeting rooms and spaces, research laboratories and workshops, libraries and museums. There are certain specific exceptions in some spaces noted in the policy and below.

Face coverings should also be worn when travelling with others in a University or College-owned or hired vehicle and in other settings required by current legislation.

6. Are there any exceptions where face coverings are not required?

There are limited specific exceptions set out in the policy where face coverings can be removed.

These include when alone in single occupancy offices, or when seated at a desk in a shared office (provided in all cases 2m social distancing is consistently maintained). This is because where face to face interaction, such as speaking with others, and movement around the space are minimized, then the risk of transmission is reduced. In addition, in these settings you are less likely to be in contact with people that you do not normally meet.

Face coverings do not need to be worn when eating or drinking (provided in all cases that 2m social distancing is consistently maintained). In addition, they do not need to be worn by staff working in settings with protective screens in place such as reception areas, or in student accommodation where students are living in defined household groups. Or when communicating with someone who uses lip reading (when 2m social distancing should still be maintained).

7. Does wearing a face covering mean that 2m social distancing is not required?

Face coverings are not a substitute for hygiene and safety measures such as self-isolating when unwell, social distancing, enhanced cleaning regimes, and regular hand-washing, and these primary mitigation measures should always be followed. Face coverings are an additional measure that those in University and College buildings are required to wear out of consideration for and to provide reassurance to others, particularly those who might be more vulnerable.

It is important to note that the definition of a contact of an infected person under the NHS Test and Trace system (who would be required to self-isolate for 14 days) does not take into account whether face coverings were worn, and so 2m distancing from others should be maintained wherever possible.

It should be noted that some individuals might struggle to maintain 2m social distancing for disability-related reasons (e.g. visual impairment or spatial awareness).

8. What is the difference between a face mask and a face covering?

A **face mask** is a form of personal protective equipment (PPE), such as a fluid-resistant surgical mask, typically used in healthcare settings. A departmental risk assessment would identify circumstances in which face masks are required to be worn as PPE. **Face coverings** are not a form of PPE and are typically cloth coverings for the nose and mouth.

9. How does this policy apply in hospital buildings?

All staff, students and contractors working on Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trusts (OUH NHS FT) sites are required to wear a face mask at all times in hospital space (e.g. common areas, corridors, shops, wards etc.) and in embedded University space on OUH NHS FT sites. This requirement applies to University staff, students, and contractors. All staff, students and contractors should read the [OUH FAQs](#) carefully before they go to work on OUH NHS FT sites.

10. What should I do if I am concerned that someone is not wearing a face covering?

Signage informing and reminding people of the requirement to wear face coverings should be displayed prominently on entering buildings and around the building. It is important to remember that some people will have legitimate reasons why they are not able to wear a face covering. Some of these reasons may be hidden and people should not be asked if they have an exemption, or the reasons for it.

Departments and Colleges should send periodic reminders to members about the policy, in particular if there are concerns about local adherence. However, it is important that such communications always acknowledge that there may be people who have a legitimate reason not to wear a face covering.

11. What should I do if someone asks me to remove my face covering to aid communication?

Some people rely on lip reading or facial cues to aid communication, and wearing of face coverings by others can make this difficult or impossible. If someone asks you to remove your face covering to assist their communication then you should do so, paying particular attention to maintaining 2m social distancing during this period.

It is possible that the use of face coverings with transparent panels over the mouth could be useful for some people in some settings. The University is investigating the effectiveness and availability of such coverings.

12. Can I remove a face covering when I am teaching?

Face coverings should be worn by students and teaching staff during in-person (face to face) teaching, except where exemptions apply to individuals as noted above, or if asked to remove a face covering to aid communication as noted above.

13. Should I wear a face covering or a face mask when working in a laboratory or workshop?

In many laboratory or workshop settings, so long as a face covering fits the individual well, and has no loose parts hanging down that may come into direct contact with other hazards, the risk of contamination is likely to be minimal. However, there will be certain locations or activities where the risk of wearing a face covering for a particular activity is deemed to be unacceptable, and these should be considered as part of the department's local risk assessments. Where a risk assessment

does identify an unacceptable risk, departments must provide 3 or 4-ply 'surgical masks' for staff in such settings if wearing a personal face covering would present an unacceptable risk of contamination/insufficient protection. Further guidance is available in the [Return to Onsite Working Guidance](#).

14. What sort of face covering should I wear?

A face covering should:

- cover your nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably
- fit comfortably but securely against the side of the face
- be secured to the head with ties or ear loops
- be made of a material that you find to be comfortable and breathable, such as cotton
- ideally include at least two layers of fabric (the World Health Organisation recommends three depending on the fabric used). The face covering may include a clear panel to allow for lip reading and facial clues to aid communication.
- unless disposable, it should be able to be washed with other items of laundry according to fabric washing instructions and dried without causing the face covering to be damaged

15. How should I put on and remove a face covering?

When wearing a face covering you should:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on
- avoid wearing on your neck or forehead
- avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could become contaminated with the virus
- change the face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it

When removing a face covering:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing
- only handle the straps, ties or clips
- do not share with someone else to use
- if single-use, dispose of it carefully in a residual waste bin and do not recycle
- if reusable, store it in a plastic bag and take it home to wash
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed

The BBC has produced a simple video on ['how not to wear a face mask'](#) that staff and students may find useful.

16. How should I look after and/or dispose of my face covering?

You should wash reusable face coverings after each time it is worn, in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric. Single use face coverings can be disposed of in a residual waste bin (i.e. not a recycling bin).

17. Will face coverings be provided to staff and students?

Staff and students (and contractors, visitors, and members of the public) are responsible for providing their own face coverings for use in University and College buildings. Departments may decide to provide face coverings for staff in public-facing roles (i.e. as part of a staff uniform).

The University will issue a starter-pack of 2 reusable face coverings per staff member from the start of the academic year.

Where surgical-type face masks are required, such as in hospital buildings or as an item of PPE identified through risk assessment, then these will be provided to staff and students.

18. Can I wear a face shield/visor instead of a face covering?

Visors (also referred to as face shields) are not a suitable alternative to face coverings. The primary purpose of wearing a close-fitting face covering is to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus from an infected person to others. Visors are considered less effective for the purpose of reducing transmission risk to others.

In contrast, visors are used principally to protect the wearer in close-contact situations, for example to protect from splashes of blood or other bodily fluids in the provision of first aid or clinical care. In such cases, a risk assessment may identify that a visor is an appropriate form of PPE to mitigate a specific risk in conjunction with other forms of PPE, for example used in combination with a fluid-resistant surgical mask.