Title:
ECDC Update on using face masks in the community

Author: Dr Louise Hendrick, Office of the CMO
Organisation: Department of Health
Date: 25th February 2021

Action required
☐ For noting
☐ For discussion
☒ For decision
Update on the use of face masks in the community

Summary

- The ECDC recently published a technical report on face mask use in the prevention of COVID-19 in the community; including medical (also known as surgical) masks; non-medical (cloth or community masks); respirators (FFP2/3 masks) and visors/face-shields.

- The review found a small to moderate protective effect with the use of medical masks for the prevention of COVID-19 in the community based on one RCT (3,000 participants); one case-control study; four cross-sectional studies and 11 ecological studies, with most studies showing a significant reduction in COVID-19 cases with the use of medical masks. However, in a few of these studies the effect was not statistically significant, and the study quality was generally low due to the serious risk of bias and indirectness.

- The review found a small to moderate protective effect with the use of non-medical masks for the prevention of COVID-19 in the community based on several ecological studies with very low certainty of evidence. Limited experimental evidence suggests a reduction in the release of respiratory droplets with the use of non-medical masks.

- Due to the limited evidence available in relation to the use of visors and face-shields the effect estimate could not be determined. Two experimental studies suggest a reduction in large respiratory droplet exposure with reduced effectiveness against smaller droplets.

- The review reports a small to moderate protective effect with the use of respirator masks. The issue of an appropriately fitted mask and training to ensure correct use were identified as crucial to their effectiveness.

- Potential adverse effects identified from the use of face masks including anxiety; perceived breathing difficulties (although there is no evidence that mask-wearing exacerbates respiratory or other diseases); adverse skin reaction; discomfort and headaches. Additionally, the challenge for those with hearing difficulties was emphasised.

- A recent Amárach survey found that 93% of respondents report wearing a face mask in public places (this was highest for those under 35 (96%) and lowest for those age 55 and over (89%)). 96% of respondents reported wearing a face mask on public transport, with 98% wearing a mask when shopping.

- International practice is highly variable with differences in mask specifications and the settings in which masks are required. However, since the last review in November 2020, the requirements have generally tightened by applying to a wider range of settings and/or higher specification mask such as surgical masks, FFP2 masks or cloth masks with filtration ≥90%.

- Recommendations for consideration are:
  - For people vulnerable to severe COVID-19, such as the elderly or those with underlying medical conditions (Appendix 2), the use of medical face masks is recommended as a means of personal protection in confined indoor and crowded outdoor spaces.
  - In households, the use of medical face masks is recommended for people with symptoms of COVID-19 or confirmed COVID-19 and for the people who share their household.
  - Based on the assessment of the available scientific evidence, no recommendation can be made on the preferred use of medical or non-medical face masks in the community.
**Background**
This report reviews existing practice in Ireland and provides an update in relation to ECDC guidance and international practice relating to the recommendations and requirements around mask-wearing.

**Current Regulations and Advice**
The wearing of face coverings became mandatory on public transport in July 2020 for those age 13 years or over. This has since been extended and current regulations which will remain in place until 9th June 2021 apply to:

- shopping centres, and shops including pharmacies
- libraries
- cinemas and cinema complexes
- theatres
- concert halls
- bingo halls
- museums
- bus and rail stations
- post offices, credit unions and banks
- nail salons, hair salons and barbers
- tattoo and piercing services
- travel agents and tour operators
- laundries and dry cleaners
- licensed bookmakers
- restaurants whilst being seated or leaving the premises
- staff in customer facing roles in bars, restaurants and cafés
- staff preparing food or beverages for consumption on the premises
- retail staff unless a screen or two-metre distance from others is present
- drivers and customers in taxis and small public service vehicles

The HSE and Department of Health also recommends mask wearing:

- when staying 2 metres apart from people is difficult
- in healthcare settings including hospitals, GP surgeries, care settings, nursing homes and dental practices
- when visiting anyone who is more at risk from COVID-19, including those aged 70 or over or people who are medically vulnerable (Appendix 2)
- by people who are being visited in their homes by those who are over 70 years of age or who are medically vulnerable
- when travelling in a vehicle except with those from the same household
- in crowded workplaces
- in places of worship
- in busy or crowded outdoor spaces where there is significant congregation

Work safety protocol recommends the use of masks in crowded workplaces where it may be difficult to maintain a 2-metre distance including entering and exiting buildings; public access areas (e.g. receptions/foyers); common areas such as toilets, stairwells, and in canteens and kitchen areas unless seated and eating or drinking. Workers sharing transport to and from work are also advised to wear face masks.
Exemptions are provided for those aged under 13 years; those for who cannot wear face coverings for medical reasons; or because it may cause severe distress; or if needed for communication; in provision of emergency care to a vulnerable person; avoidance of harm; for the taking of medication and members of on-duty members of an Gardai Síochána.

A face covering is defined as “a covering of any type which when worn by a person covers the person’s nose and mouth”. Category 1 masks are those that filter more than 90 percent of particles, and includes medical/surgical face masks, respirator masks (FFP2, FFP3, N95, N99 filter masks) and fabric masks with filtration levels ≥90%. Category 2 masks are those that have been proved to filter more than 70 percent of particles and includes non-medical masks and most cloth masks.

In Ireland, the use of medical masks is currently reserved for healthcare workers or patients in treatment; with the use of non-medical/community face masks recommended or required as above. The use of visors or face shields is not advised, except where an individual may be exempt from mask-wearing e.g. communication difficulties; certain medical conditions.

**Figure 1. Types of face mask and shield**

ECDC Update on Face Masks in the Community

- The ECDC recently published a technical report providing an update on the effectiveness of the use of face masks in the community in reducing transmission of COVID-19. Based on a review of 92 studies on face mask effectiveness (17 RCTs, 33 observational and 42 experimental) and 26 studies on adverse effects (2 RCTs, 1 crossover and 23 observational) a small to moderate protective effect from the use of medical masks in the community was found, with scarce (and very low certainty) evidence for the effectiveness of non-medical masks, face shields/visors and respirators in the community.
- The report proposed the following:
  - In areas with community transmission of COVID-19, wearing a medical or non-medical face mask is recommended in confined public spaces and can be considered in crowded outdoor settings.
  - For people vulnerable to severe COVID-19, such as the elderly or those with underlying medical conditions, the use of medical face masks is recommended as a means of personal protection in the above-mentioned settings.
  - In households, the use of medical face masks is recommended for people with symptoms of COVID-19 or confirmed COVID-19 and for the people who share their household.
  - Based on the assessment of the available scientific evidence, no recommendation can be made on the preferred use of medical or non-medical face masks in the community.
  - When non-medical face masks are used, it is advisable that masks that comply with available guidelines for filtration efficacy and breathability are preferred.
- The use of respirators, including N95/N99/FFP2/FFP3 masks, is not supported at present due to risk of inappropriate fitting.
The role of mask wearing as complimentary to other public health measures was emphasised.

**ECDC Evidence**

- The review found a small to moderate protective effect on the effectiveness of medical masks for the prevention of COVID-19. This was based on one RCT (3,000 participants) with results supporting a relative reduction of risk lower than 50%. Additionally, one case-control study and three of four cross-sectional studies showing a statistically significant favourable effect (OR range 0.16-0.3). Of 11 ecological studies, 9 showed a reduction in COVID-19 cases, ranging from 6% to 82% following the introduction of masks; and another study showing a reduction in the number of deaths with the introduction of mask-wearing. Study quality was generally low due to the serious risk of bias and indirectness.

- Existing evidence relating to influenza, SARS and other respiratory viral infections identified 8 cluster RCTs relating to prevention of transmission within a household from an ill individual. Two RCTs showing a statically significant favourable effect with medical mask use within 36 hours of symptom onset; three showed statistically insignificant mixed results. Two cluster RCTs in a community setting showed a non-statistically significant effect of the use of medical face masks however compliance was an issue. Two case-control studies specific to SARS found a large statistically significant favourable effect with the use of face masks [OR 0.3-0.36].

- Due to the limited evidence available in relation to the use of visors and face-shields the effect estimate could not be determined. Two experimental studies suggest a reduction in large respiratory droplet exposure with reduced effectiveness against smaller droplets.

- The review reports a small to moderate protective effect with the use of respirator masks. The issue of an appropriately fitted mask and training to ensure correct use were identified as crucial to their effectiveness.

- Potential adverse effects identified from the use of face masks including anxiety; perceived breathing difficulties (although there is no evidence that mask-wearing exacerbates respiratory of other diseases); adverse skin reaction; discomfort and headaches. Additionally, the challenge for those with hearing difficulties was emphasised.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Protection against COVID-19 effect estimate</th>
<th>Certainty of evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical face masks for prevention of COVID-19</td>
<td>Small to moderate</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-medical face masks for prevention of COVID-19</td>
<td>Small to moderate</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face shields/visors and transparent face masks for prevention of COVID-19</td>
<td>Appears less effective against smaller droplets</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respirators for prevention of COVID-19</td>
<td>Small to moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recent behavioural research findings on use of face coverings**

Data from Irish polls demonstrates the high compliance to mandatory face covering wearing in Ireland. As of 22nd February 2021:

- 93% of respondents report wearing a face mask in public places
• This is 96% for those under 35; 94% for those aged 35-44; 95% for those aged 45-54 and 89% in those age 55 and over
• 91% of males and 96% of females report mask-wearing in public places
• 96% wear a mask when using public transport
• 98% wear a mask when shopping
• 45% plan to wear a face covering in public ‘after’ Coronavirus, a decrease from 50% in July 2020

Summary of key points from international practice
• Since the last update in November the requirements for mask-wearing across Europe have generally tightened, either through higher specification masks or increased number of locations where masks must be worn.
• A requirement for FFP2 masks to be worn in public places and on public transport was introduced in Austria, the Czech Republic, and parts of Germany.
• Both Austria and Germany have provided a free pack of FFP2 masks to elderly and at-risk individuals. The Czech Republic has provided 1 FFP2 and 5 medical masks to those age over 60.
• The requirement for category 1 masks (with filtration ≥90%) has been introduced in France, with all new masks being produced in Spain required to be category 1.
• The use of surgical masks infected individuals is recommended in Canada, Estonia, and Denmark.
• The minimum age for mask wearing is highly variable, ranging from 2 years (Canada, USA, Croatia) to 13 years (Ireland, Northern Ireland, Netherlands).
• Of 37 countries reviewed, all countries except for Sweden and New Zealand, which is currently at alert level 1, require masks to be worn on public transport.
• Of 37 countries, all except Finland, Sweden and New Zealand require masks to be worn in indoor public spaces.
• The use of masks in outdoor public places varies:
  o some countries have specified locations where masks must be worn such as Paris and its suburbs; named streets in parts of Germany and Switzerland; environmental and natural sites in Latvia.
  o others require masks to be worn if a physical distancing (ranging from 1 to 2 metres) cannot be maintained (Victoria, Australia; Belgium; Bulgaria, Croatia; Spain; Portugal; Slovakia among others)
  o some require masks to be worn in all outdoor spaces (Greece; Lazio, Italy; Malta)
• A number of countries mandated for the use of masks outdoors provide clear exemptions for more isolated outdoor areas including Poland (forests, parks, botanical gardens, family allotments and beaches); Lithuania (countryside where there is at least a 20m radius from others); and Italy (in isolated areas, with the exception of Lazio).
• Exemptions typically apply for those exercising outdoors (Bulgaria; Cyprus; Greece; Lithuania; Spain; Malta).
• Several countries and jurisdictions require the wearing of masks in settings which are recommended but not currently required in Ireland including:
  o Offices/workplaces (Finland; France; Greece; Portugal; Slovakia; Switzerland)
  o Healthcare settings (Denmark; Croatia; Czech Republic)
  o Outdoor markets (Austria; Luxembourg; Switzerland)
  o Open air events (Hungary)
  o Demonstrations (Austria; Germany; Netherlands; Switzerland)
  o At family events (Canada; Portugal)
Appendix 1: International practice

The practice in a number of countries as of 23rd February 2021 is captured below and detailed in Appendix 1.

Australia
Victoria
- Wearing a fitted face mask is a mandatory requirement for those age 12 and over in the following settings: indoors (except in homes); outdoors when a distance of 1.5 metres from others cannot be maintained (except with people from the same household); on public transport; in a ride share or taxi; on domestic flights to and from Victoria; by delivery drivers; at airports and when visiting hospitals and care facilities.
- Those age 12 and over that are attending post-primary school are required to wear a mask at school. Teachers are not required to wear a mask while teaching but must wear a mask in other indoor areas of the schools if physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Face shields, bandanas and scarves are deemed insufficient.
- Exemptions are provided for those with certain medical conditions; with communication difficulties; exercising outdoors; and riding a bicycle or motorcycle.

New South Wales
- Masks are required on public transport including waiting areas; at airports and on commercial domestic flights; in places of worship and indoor religious services including weddings and funerals; in hair and beauty premises; at spas and tattoo and massage parlours; in gaming areas in licensed premises and in hospitality venues for staff who have a customer-facing role.
- Masks are recommended for vulnerable individuals, when it may be difficult to maintain 1.5 metres from others and at retail shopping venues.

Austria
- FFP2 masks are required for those age 14 and over in public and indoors (except within a household); and applies to public transport (and the associated underground stations, platforms, stops, train stations and airports); when carpooling; on cable cars and cog railways; in all shops; markets; zoos; in restaurants when picking up food (restaurants are currently closed); in communal spaces in accommodation facilities (currently closed); in customer areas of business and service premises; at currently permitted events (e.g. funerals) and at open cultural institutions (museums; libraries; art halls). Leisure and other culture facilities are currently closed.
- Masks are also required in school for those age 6 and over with age-appropriate communication campaigns in operation.
- A tight-fitting non-medical mask is permitted in children over 6 years and under 14; pregnant women and for certain medical reasons.
- In addition, a minimum distance of two metres from other people must be maintained in public places, except for those in the same household.
- Packs of free FFP2 masks were provided to elderly residents and low-income households in mid-January 2021. Spar Austria is also providing one free mask per day to customers.

Belgium
- Masks are mandatory if a physical distance of 1.5 metres cannot be respected for all those over 13 years. Including on public transport; in transport stations or stops; for contact professions and their customers; for restaurant and catering staff; for customers of catering establishments, except when they are sitting at their own table; in shops and shopping centres; in shopping streets, on markets, flea markets and fairs and in any crowded private or public
Face masks are required at school, except for practical lessons where this is not possible. First-year students (age 12 years) are exempt.

Any mask type or fabric alternative is permitted.

Bulgaria

- Wearing a face mask is mandatory in all indoor public spaces and all outdoor spaces where it is not possible to maintain a social distance of at least 1.5 metres. Exceptions to this measure include customers at dining and drinking establishments; those exercising outdoors/indoors; and children under six years old.
- Mask wearing is required in schools from fifth to twelfth grade, including in common indoor and outdoor areas. First to fourth grade teachers are excluded if they teach only one class and can maintain a distance of ≥1.5 metres from pupils.
- Face shields, scarfs or other face coverings are not permitted in place of a face mask.

Canada

- Non-medical masks are recommended from age 2 and over in indoor and outdoor spaces shared with people from another household, including parks, homes, backyards, workplaces, retail settings, outdoor markets, street get-togethers, recreational settings, and public transportation.
- Those at higher risk of more severe disease or outcomes if infected or at risk of exposure to COVID-19 because of their work or living situation are advised to wear a well-fitted non-medical mask or consider wearing a medical mask where available.
- Medical masks are recommended for infected individuals that need to leave their isolation accommodation; or are sharing a space with others.
- Specific recommendations are advised by individual local public health authorities.
- Wearing of masks by school children, teachers and staff is recommended for all ages.

Croatia

- Face masks are mandatory in closed spaces, shops; commercial premises; taxis; hospitals; on public transport, and in restaurants and cafes except when seated at the table.
- Masks are recommended outdoors when a distance of two metres cannot be maintained e.g. in queues. Fines for non-compliance or incorrectly worn masks were recently introduced.
- Those with chronic diseases and/or age 60 and over are advised to avoid crowded public places (including using public transport at peak times).

Cyprus

- Masks must be worn indoors except for within households and in outdoor public places, except when exercising, with a fine of €300 for non-compliance.

Czech Republic

- All persons are required to wear a face mask or other covering of the nose and mouth while outside of their place of residence.
- FFP2 masks or double masking with surgical masks became mandatory in shops, public transport, and hospitals from February 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 2021.
Every Czech citizen over the age of 60 has been issued with one FFP2 respirator and five face masks from September 2020.

Exemptions are permitted for members of a single household travelling by car; for bus drivers who are separated from passengers in a separate cabin; for those with certain medical conditions; children under the age of seven and artists (actors, singers, or TV presenters) at work.

**Denmark**
- Masks are required for all persons aged 12 and over on public transport (excluding bus stops); and in public spaces including establishments selling food, drinks or tobacco; all wholesale and retail shops; at premises for cultural, sports and club activities; at religious activities; at job centres and citizens service centres; at day-care facilities, elementary schools and after-school care facilities; at schools and education facilities; at public and private hospitals and clinics; at respite care facilities, foster care facilities and institutions for people with mental disorders or special needs in the social care sector; and during practical driving tests.

**Estonia**
- Masks are required in public indoor spaces for those age 12 and over.
- Infected individuals are advised to wear surgical masks.

**Finland**
- The requirement relating to mask use is informed by three phase system: base level; acceleration phase and community transmission.
- At present, masks are currently recommended on public transport and in other public vehicles, including taxis; all public indoor spaces; at public events; in schools and educational institutions starting from grade 6 of comprehensive school (ages 12 and over); and in indoor work communities where several people are working or present in the same space.
- From August 2020 the government mandated that municipalities make free masks available to low-income residents; with distribution across several locations including aid points; parishes; NGOS and third sector operators; healthcare and social service locations.

**France**
- FFP2 masks or surgical masks are required in all public indoor spaces and on public transport. Additionally, masks are required in outdoor spaces across 400 cities and towns including Paris and its suburbs.
- From February 8th, 2021, masks are required for ages 6 and over at school with minimum filtration of 90%.

**Germany**
- Masks are obligatory in many public spaces in Germany with rules varying by State. Disposable surgical masks or medical-grade masks are required on public transport, in shops, at medical practices and in church.
- Bavaria and Schleswig-Holstein recently mandated FFP2 masks, and other states are expected to follow suit.
- In Berlin medical face masks (surgical masks, FFP2, KN95 masks) are required in shops; on local public transport; at railway stations; at airports; in commercial enterprises; in medical practices; in hospitals and nursing homes; in office and administrative buildings if 1.5-metre minimum distance cannot be safely maintained; in taxis and on private journeys for persons from another household (excluding car drivers); at religious services and events. Standard
masks are required at markets; in busy streets; in schools; for all others attending office and administrative buildings; at premises serving food; and at demonstrations.\(^{25}\)

- The German government provided vouchers for 12 FFP2 masks to 34.1 million at risk individuals.

**Greece\(^{26}\)**

- At present, it is mandatory to wear a mask in all indoor and outdoor public places (except when exercising outdoors) including schools (except during gym activities). Masks are not required once seated in a restaurant or café; and when driving alone or with first-degree family members.

**Hungary\(^{27}\)**

- It is mandatory to wear a face mask on public transport and in shops; taxis; entertainment venues including cinemas, theatres and concert halls; health and social care institutions, restaurants; public offices and at sporting events. Compliance with the rules is monitored and violators can face a fine.

**Iceland\(^{28}\)**

- Face masks should be used in public transport, shops, and other services; and where it is not possible to ensure a 2-metre proximity restriction, such as in healthcare, taxis and group cars.
- Masks are required in secondary schools, universities and music schools for both students and teachers; and in pupils from grades 5 to 10 where a 2-metre distance cannot be maintained.\(^{29}\)

**Italy\(^{30}\)**

- Mask are mandatory in those aged 6 years and older in public places indoors and outdoors except where individuals of the same household are gathered or a distance of one metre can be maintained from others. Masks are recommended inside houses when in the presence of non-cohabiting people.
- Ski resorts were briefly re-opened with a required to wear an FFP2 mask on ski lifts, shelters, or ticket offices, although resorts were subsequently closed.\(^{31}\)

**Latvia\(^{32}\)**

- Face masks are required for all those age 7 and over in all indoor public places, on public transport and in outdoor spaces including open-air trail visits; museums; and near environmental and natural sites that are visited by a large number of people.
- Municipalities and associated social services have established procedures for issuing free disposable masks to residents with status of low-income or poor; in addition to those staying shelters; attending day care centres, crisis centres or receiving home care.

**Lithuania\(^{33}\)**

- Face masks are mandatory in public, both indoors and outdoors for all age 6 and over, except in those exercising or undertaking sports training; in certain medical conditions; outside populated areas (cities, towns, villages) when there are no other people within a 20-metre radius, or when seated at a table in a bar or restaurant.
- It is recommended to wear a face mask at a private party, if held, or when socialising with members of other families or households.

**Luxembourg\(^{34}\)**

- Face masks are mandatory for those aged 6 and over in public spaces (e.g. in administrations open to the public, shops and supermarkets), on public transport; and for any gathering of
people that brings more than 4 people together at the same time, either in a closed area or in the open air.

Malta
- Face masks or visors are mandatory for those age 3 and over outside the home, in all indoor and outdoor places. Visors are required in banks (rather than masks, for security reasons).
- Employers are responsible for providing appropriate masks or visors for their employees.

Netherlands
- Face masks are mandatory for all those aged 13 and over in all indoor public spaces and covered areas including educational institutions, on public transport (including at stations, on platforms and at stops) and at locations where contact-based professions are carried out, as well as shops, town halls and train stations.
- Face masks are not mandatory in private buildings that are not freely accessible to the public.

New Zealand
- New Zealand is currently at alert Level 1 which legally requires individuals to wear a face mask or covering on all public transport, including on long-distance bus and train journeys and most ferries and on domestic flights throughout New Zealand. Masks are recommended, but not legally required, to be worn by taxi and ride-share drivers. Masks are not required in the school setting including on school transport.
- At alert Level 2 masks are mandated on all public transport. Individuals may choose to wear a mask or face covering in situations where physical distancing outside their bubble is not possible. At Alert Levels 3 and 4 mask-wearing is highly recommended in closed spaces where physical distancing is not always possible and contact with other people outside their bubble may occur.

Norway
- Masks must be worn by those age 12 and over when maintaining a distance of at least one metre from others (except household members) is not possible, including in public areas, on public transport, in shops, in taxis, at stations, in restaurants (open for takeaway), in shopping centres and places of worship. Employees are required to wear a mask if a distance of one metre from visitors cannot be maintained and no alternate infection control measures e.g. partitions have been implemented.
- Professional drivers, that are exempt from providing proof of a negative PCR test on entry to Norway are required to wear face covering in all situations where they are outside of their vehicles in locations where other people are present.

Poland
- Masks are mandatory in all public areas: streets, roads, squares, cemeteries, promenades, boulevards, vehicle parking places, forest parking lots, buses, trams and trains, shops/shopping malls, banks, markets, post office, cinema and theatre, physician’s offices, outpatient clinics, hospitals, massage and tattoo parlour, churches, schools, at universities, and in the government offices and civic centres.
- Masks not mandatory to wear in the forest, parks, green squares, community gardens, botanical gardens, family allotments, beaches and while travelling by private car.

Portugal
- Masks are mandatory for all those age 10 and over in all enclosed spaces public spaces and outdoor areas when physical distancing of 2 metres cannot be guaranteed.
• Masks are also required on public transport, in taxis and in workplaces when physical distance is not practicable.

Romania⁴¹
• Masks required in indoor and outdoor public spaces including farmers’ markets and bus stations, and on public transport.
• Wearing a protective mask inside the school is mandatory for teachers and students, starting with those in primary school.⁴²

Slovakia⁴³
• Masks are required in all indoor public places; on public transport and outdoors.
• Exceptions are made for employees working at their workplace alone and during sports activities.
• With the reopening of schools, all fifth to ninth graders at primary schools and all secondary school students required to wear masks in the classroom and outside spaces, with a recommendation for younger schoolchildren to wear them as well.⁴⁴

Slovenia⁴⁵
• Masks are mandatory in public space, on public transport and outdoors when a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained.
• Additionally, masks are required for those with respiratory infection or those caring for someone who has a respiratory infection.
• With the partial reopening of schools, teachers are required to wear a mask at all times, with children required to wear masks outside their classrooms or their bubbles.⁴⁶

Spain⁴⁷
• The use of face coverings is mandatory for those age 6 years and over on public transport and indoor and outdoor public spaces including public streets and open-air spaces where a distance of 1.5 metres cannot be safely maintained, including attendance at demonstrations.
• The government introduced an amendment on 11th February that cloth or material face masks being sold to the public must be ≥90% efficient.⁴⁸
• Masks should be worn at school for those age 6 and over.⁴⁹

Switzerland⁵⁰
• Face masks are required in all public spaces and areas accessible to the public including areas of business; on public transport, and outdoors in busy pedestrian areas in towns and villages and any other outdoor space where a distance of 1.5 metres from others cannot be maintained including parks, playgrounds, streets and pavements.
• Masks must be worn in indoor spaces at work unless alone, even if a large distance from co-workers can be achieved.
• All students and staff attending upper secondary school must always wear a mask on the school grounds.
• Surgical masks are recommended for those with symptoms of acute respiratory disease. The use of respirator masks is advised against, as is the use of visors, shields and cloth scarves.

Sweden⁵¹
• CE marked face masks are recommended for those age 16 and over travelling on public transport on weekdays from 7am to 9am and from 4pm to 6pm. They are also recommended when physical distance on public transport cannot be maintained.

United Kingdom
• **England**
  o Masks are mandatory on public transport; in taxis; in most indoor public spaces (including shops, supermarkets, shopping centres, premises providing hospitality except when seated to eat and/or drink, hospitals, community health or social care settings, cultural centres, entertainment venues, banks, post offices).
  o Additionally, masks should be worn in indoor places where social distancing may be difficult.
  o The use of face coverings in Higher Education, Further Education and secondary schools is required unless 2 metre social distancing can be maintained. Face coverings are now also recommended in early years and primary schools for staff and adult visitors in situations where social distancing between adults is not possible, including in corridors and communal areas.

• **Northern Ireland**
  o Face coverings are required for those age 13 or over in certain indoor settings including shops, shopping centres, on public transport (including school transport), taxis, public transport stations and airports, banks, some government offices and in private work settings where a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained. It is not mandatory to wear a face covering in a business that is able to maintain social distancing by using a system of ticketing or appointments, while seated at a restaurant or bar and at the gym.
  o Post-primary pupils and teachers are required to wear masks in the classroom and in communal areas.

• **Wales**
  o Masks are required by those age 11 and over in indoor public places, in places where food and drink is served except when seated, and on public transport. Masks are recommended outdoors where social distancing of two metres is impossible.
  o Face coverings should be worn by secondary school learners and staff everywhere outside the classroom. Face coverings should also be worn by secondary school pupils on school transport and by visitors and parents entering the school estate.

• **Scotland**
  o Masks are required for those age 5 and over on public transport; in workplaces (other than early learning or school settings); health and social care settings; in any premises open to members of the public and used for the retail sale or hire of goods or services; all hospitality premises; banks, building societies, credit unions and post offices; courts and tribunal buildings; places of worship; visitor attractions; entertainment venues; community centres; crematoria and funeral directors’ premises; libraries and public reading rooms; storage and distribution facilities; indoor fitness studios and leisure centres; sports stadiums and conference or exhibition centre.
  o Masks are recommended outdoors in situations where 2 metre physical distancing cannot be maintained including at the school gate.
  o Masks are required by senior phase students in the classroom and all pupils and adults in communal areas. Additionally, masks are required by teachers and staff where a 2-metre distance cannot be maintained.

• **USA**
  o Masks are required nationally on all public transport including stations and terminals. since April to use face coverings in public.
  o Mask mandates exist at a state level for 35 states and 4 overseas territories, ranging from a requirement to wear a mask in those age 2 and over when leaving a place of residence to specifying certain situations in which masks should be worn.
The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has advised universal and correct use of masks by all students, teachers and staff.59

Figure 2: Face covering policies globally as at Feb 18th 2021
Appendix 2: Extremely Medically Vulnerable People

1. People aged ≥ 70 years.
2. Solid organ transplant recipients.
3. People with specific cancers:
   a) People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy for lung cancer.
   b) People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma that are at any stage of treatment.
   c) People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer.
   d) People having other targeted cancer treatments, which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors.
   e) People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.
4. People with severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, pulmonary fibrosis/ lung fibrosis/ interstitial lung disease and severe COPD.
5. People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell).
6. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
7. Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.

Those in doubt about their vulnerability are advised to talk to their GP or Occupational Health Service.
References

1 Department of Health. Statutory Instruments S.I. no. 21 of 2021 Health Act 1947 (section 31A – Temporary restrictions) (COVID-19) (Face Coverings in Certain Premises and Business) Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2021
2 HSE When to wear a face covering https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-coverings-masks-and-covid-19/when-to-wear.html
7 Department of Health Amárach Coronavirus Tracker: Public Opinion Tracking Research: 22/02/21
21 Coronavirus updates from Helsinki https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/coronavirus-en/information/face-mask
22 Gouvernement de France Informations Coronavirus https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus
Schools have opened. They have to follow strict measures against COVID-19 in Romania for around 2.8 mln students. Ministry of Health Masks do good. Government of the Netherlands Face mask rules come into effect on Monday.

School Reopening: Teachers Will Wear Masks All the Time, Children Only Outside Classrooms

Spain Travel Health FAQs
https://www.spth.gob.es/faq?tab=2

What you need to know about Spain’s restrictions on cloth face masks
https://www.thelocal.es/20210211/what-you-need-to-know-about-spains-cloth-face-mask-restrictions

Ministerio de Sanidad, Consumo y Bienestar Social

Bundesamt für Gesundheit BAG

KrisInformation

Department for Education Face coverings in education

Covid-19: Post-primary pupils in NI to wear face coverings in class

Welsh Government Face coverings: guidance for public
https://gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-public

Scottish Government Coronavirus (COVID-19): public use of face coverings

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on reducing the risks in schools

CDC Guidance for Wearing Masks

US News These States Have COVID-19 Mask Mandates

CDC Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation

HPSC. COVID-19 Guidance for Older People and Others at Risk of Severe Disease on Reducing Risk of COVID-19 Infection. Appendix 1