National Public Health Emergency Team

Item 5a: Information Note on Face Coverings

19 November 2020

Action required
☒ For noting
☐ For discussion
☐ For decision
Use of face coverings: Overview of position in Ireland and internationally

Information Note for NPHET

Purpose of Note
This information note provides an overview of the current Regulations and advice in relation to the wearing of face coverings in Ireland and also provides a summary of practice in other countries. The note identifies a number of areas where the wearing of face coverings is commonly advised in other countries and may help inform any NPHET considerations in relation to further advice on the wearing of face coverings.

Current Regulations and Advice
The wearing of face coverings is already mandatory in a number of settings in Ireland\(^1\). For instance, on public transport (SI 244 of 2020, recently extended in SI 512 of 2020), which encompasses all bus and rail services provided under contract with the National Transport Authority (NTA), LUAS services and commercial bus services licensed by the NTA. Members of the public are also required to wear face coverings in certain indoor premises (SI 296 of 2020 recently extended in SI 511 of 2020), including in retail settings, shopping centres, libraries, cinemas, theatres, concert halls and museums. The regulations also apply to premises where certain services are provided, including nail salons, hair salons, tattoo and piercing services, travel agents and licensed bookmakers. Exemptions are provided for those aged under 13 years and for those for who cannot wear face coverings for medical reasons, for communications purposes, or because it may cause severe distress.

In addition to the regulations in effect, guidance also provides for the wearing of face coverings in many settings\(^2\). The public are advised to wear a face covering

- when staying 2 metres apart from people is difficult;
- in a healthcare setting (including hospitals, GP surgeries, care settings, nursing homes and dental practices);
- when visiting those at increased risk including those aged 70+ or who are medically vulnerable\(^3\).

Fáilte Ireland guidance advises that face coverings be worn by employees in customer facing roles and by customers when arriving to and leaving their table\(^4\). Updated Fáilte Ireland guidance also outlines issues around the efficacy of visors compared with masks\(^5\).

Extensions to Regulations underway
Regulations are being finalised to provide for the mandatory wearing of face coverings in the following areas:
- Workers in customer facing roles in premises that sell or supply food and beverage for consumption on the premises.
- Drivers and customers in taxis and small public service vehicles.
- In bus and rail stations.

\(^{2}\) https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable-gloves.html
\(^{5}\) https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/ppe/useoffacetomsbythegeneralpublic/Current%20evidence%20on%20the%20use%20of%20face%20coverings.pdf
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 20 October:

- 94% of respondents report that they are compliant and adhere to recommendations from the DoH, HSE
- 90% wear face coverings when in public places - up from 22% in May
- 96% wear them when shopping
- 96% when using public transport
- 29% report already wear a face covering when outside, and 56% report that they would if they were recommended by health authorities

Sentiment towards face coverings has shifted over the course of the Covid-outbreak and they have now become part of the reality of Covid-19. While they are not liked, they are now seen as part of the way forward and one of the enablers that will allow the country re-open. There can be confusion around face coverings and therefore clear communication is required.

Summary of key points from international practice

- It is mandatory in a number of countries and jurisdictions to wear a mask in public generally, including in Slovenia; Malta; Greece; Cyprus; Bulgaria; New Zealand (at Alert Level 4); Victoria; in a number of French cities including Paris.
- In a number of countries and jurisdictions where it is mandatory to wear a mask in public, clear exemptions are provided for more isolated outdoor areas including in Poland (not mandatory in the forest, parks, botanical gardens, family allotments and beaches); Lithuania (not mandatory in the countryside where there is nobody within 20m of your group); and Italy (not mandatory in isolated areas).
- Where masks are required outdoors there is generally an exemption provided for those who are exercising (Bulgaria; Cyprus; Spain; Lithuania) or exercising strenuously (Victoria; Malta).
- It is mandatory to wear a mask in busy public areas and streets in a number of countries and jurisdictions including Belgium; Czech Republic; Berlin; and Greece. Similarly a number of countries and jurisdictions make it mandatory when it is difficult to maintain social distancing of 1.5-2m including Spain; Portugal and Slovakia.
- In a number of countries and jurisdictions, it is recommended to wear a mask when it is difficult to maintain social distancing including New South Wales and in New Zealand (at Alert Level 2).
- A number of countries and jurisdictions require the wearing of masks in settings not currently covered in Ireland including:
  - Offices/workplaces, when not seated at desk (Greece; France; Berlin; Finland)
  - Healthcare settings (at doctors and chemists in Austria) and during hospital and nursing home visits (Denmark)
  - Outdoor markets (Austria, Luxembourg, Switzerland) and open air events (Hungary)
  - Demonstrations (Austria, Switzerland)
  - At family events (Portugal)
Based on practice in other countries, there a number of additional situations where the wearing of face coverings in Ireland could be considered:

- **Outdoors when it is difficult to maintain social distancing of 2m.** Examples of such settings might include on busy shopping streets; at outdoor markets and other outdoor events; in queues; when dropping children to school; in playgrounds (adults only); on the side-line at sports events; at demonstrations or marches.

- **In offices/workplaces,** indoors in communal areas in workplaces including shared offices, corridors, and other shared workspaces.

- **In gyms, indoor fitness studios, swimming pools or other indoor leisure centres,** except when undertaking strenuous exercise.

**Important points to note:**

- Any advice in relation to face covering usage outdoors should relate only to situations where it is not possible to socially distance.
- It is not recommended to wear a mask during strenuous exercise.
- It is not necessary to wear a mask where it is possible to socially distance e.g. on the beach, in a park.
- The current exemptions continue to apply: for those aged under 13 years and for those for who cannot wear face coverings for medical reasons, for communications purposes, or because it may cause severe distress.
- It is proposed that these recommendations would be advisory rather than mandatory in the first instance as some of these situations may be difficult to regulate for.

**Appendix 1: International practice**
Below is an overview of practice in a number of other countries and jurisdictions. Please note that countries are updating measures on a continuous basis and the position outlined below was correct at time of writing.

**Australia**

**Victoria**

- Wearing a fitted face mask in **public** is mandatory in Victoria, unless a person has a lawful reason for not wearing one. Face shields, bandanas and scarves are not sufficient.
- Mask should be put on before a person leaves the **car**. If a person is driving a car for work — e.g. deliveries — or is with people from outside their household, they must wear a face mask.
- A **babysitter** must wear a face mask and stay at least 1.5 metres apart where possible when minding children at someone’s home and **guests** should keep their face mask on during their visit to a home (no longer in place).
- Exemptions are provided for those with certain medical conditions; when doing strenuous exercise such as jogging or cycling; when it’s not possible to do your jobs while wearing a mask and for children under 12.

**New South Wales**

Masks recommended:

- if it’ll be **difficult to stay 1.5 metres** from others
- in **areas** where there are known cases of **community transmission**
- in an **enclosed space** such as on public transport
- in **supermarkets and shops**
- in **indoor venues with a higher risk of transmission** or where customers and staff interact including at hospitality and retail venues
- at places of **worship**

**New Zealand**

Wearing a mask is recommended or mandatory depending on the Alert Level:

- At Alert **Level 1** – not legally required to wear face coverings
- At alert **Level 2** - a good idea to wear a face covering if a person cannot physically distance, must wear a mask on public transport.
- At Alert **Level 3** – a person must wear a face covering if they cannot physically distance and on public transport. A person should wear a face covering in places where there are lots of people, supermarket, pharmacy, markets.
- At Alert **Level 4** - If a person does need to go out they should wear a face covering whenever they leave home.

**Austria**

- A mask must be worn on **public transport; in taxis; in healthcare settings** (e.g. at the doctor’s or chemist’s); in all shops, bakeries, post offices, banks; in all public indoor areas at museums, train stations etc; in all public indoor areas in hotels and in restaurants whenever you’re away from the table; at indoor events; wherever a minimum distance of one metre cannot be

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maintained (e.g. in the service sector, such as at the hairdresser’s); at outdoor markets, including Christmas markets whenever you are not drinking or eating.9

- There can be additional regional measures in place.
- Mandatory use of face masks at demonstrations.

Belgium

- Masks are mandatory in all locations where social distancing cannot be guaranteed. This includes mandatory use on public transport. It is mandatory to wear a face mask in indoor public spaces, including in shops, cinemas, theatres, concert and conference halls, auditoriums, museums, libraries, hairdressers and places of worship. Children below the age of twelve are exempt. It is mandatory to wear a face mask in busy shopping streets and public buildings.10

Bulgaria

- Face masks are obligatory to wear in all outdoor spaces from 22 October till the end of November.11
- Wearing a face covering outside is mandatory when 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;
  - participants in conferences, when speaking;
  - those exercising outdoors/indoors; and,
  - children under six years old.
- Wearing a face mask is mandatory in all indoor public spaces, with some exceptions for customers in dining and drinking establishments.12

Cyprus13

- Masks must be worn indoors and in outdoor public places with a fine of €300 for non-compliance.
- Masks are required for those working in public transport, direct retail services and offices.
- Masks are obligatory in all outdoor areas, except while exercising. They are already so in all indoor areas where two or more people are present.14

Czech Republic

- The requirement for face masks is extended to outdoor public transport stops and waiting areas.15
- Masks are mandatory nationwide inside buildings.16
- Masks are mandatory on public transport.17
- As of 21 October people will also have to wear face masks even in cars, if they are travelling with someone who is not a member of a joint household, and in publicly accessible places in

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10 https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/belgium/coronavirus
12 https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/bulgaria/coronavirus
13 DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
14 https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2020/oct/22/coronavirus-live-news-france-nears-1m-cases-as-four-us-states-see-record-one-day-deaths?page=with:block-5f918a048f08c62805b123c9#liveblog-navigation
15 DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
the built-up area of a municipality, if at that place there are more than two persons closer than two metres apart and they are not members of the same household.18

**Denmark**19
- Requirement to wear masks indoors (previously only in restaurants, bars when not seated and on public transport). The new requirement includes retail, cultural institutions, secondary level education etc.
- Masks are required at test centres in a number of the country’s regions.
- The wearing of masks is recommended for making **hospital visits**, transport from a risk area to an airport and when caring for relatives with COVID-19; for **staff, patients and residents** when visiting hospitals or nursing homes.

**Germany**
- Masks are obligatory in **many public spaces** in Germany and rules vary by State.
- In Berlin, it is compulsory to wear a mask at **outdoor markets, on particularly busy streets, shopping malls and queues** where the minimum distance of 1.5 meters cannot be maintained (announced by the Senate on Tuesday 20 October).20 Masks are also compulsory inside **office buildings** when moving around.

**Greece**21
- Within ‘Tier 4’ and ‘Tier 3’ regions, it is mandatory to wear a mask in all public spaces (both indoors and outdoors), at all times.
- Mandatory use of a mask on all **public transport** and at airports;
- Mandatory use of masks in all **public indoor spaces**, including medical and healthcare facilities, lifts, staircases and any enclosed venue providing goods or services (including supermarkets, grocery stores, bakeries, cafes, banks, government and utility providers’ offices, retail shops, barber shops, hairdressers and beauty parlours and places of worship);
- Mandatory use of a mask in all **indoor workplaces**;
- Mandatory use of a mask in all **crowded outdoor spaces**, where social distancing cannot be maintained, including at bus stops, in public parks and squares;
- Recommendation for general use of masks for a week by travellers to Greece from areas with high coronavirus rates.
- From 7 November: obligatory use of facemasks in all indoor and outdoor public and communal spaces, including work-places and on public transport.

**Spain**2223
- The use of face coverings is mandatory for anyone over the age of 6 years old on all forms of **public transport in Spain and in many other indoor and outdoor public spaces**.
- Most regions in Spain have now made the use of face masks obligatory in both indoor and outdoor public spaces when it is not possible to guarantee social distancing of 1.5 metres.
- There are exceptions to this rule such as medical waivers, eating or drinking, or while practicing individual outdoor sports.

**Finland**

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18 Ibidem
19 DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
21 https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/greece/coronavirus
22 https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/spain/coronavirus-
23 https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rdl/2020/06/09/21/ [regulations]
- Masks recommended in secondary schools, colleges, universities and other institutions as well as other public events and indoor situations when safe distancing is not possible.\(^{24}\)
- In Helsinki, the wearing of face masks is recommended for all persons aged 15 or above: public transport; public events and spaces, such as shops and banks; city services, such as libraries, social and health care services, and cultural services; at sports and cultural events; on all recreational premises; parents visiting early education premises when dropping off and picking up their children; social and health care staff in patient and customer contact; in all other workplaces when safe distances, rotated room usage or other hygiene and safety arrangements are not possible.\(^{25}\)

**France**\(^{26}\)
- Wearing face masks in **enclosed public spaces and on public transport** is compulsory.
- Wearing masks in **open and shared working spaces** (including cafeterias, corridors and meeting rooms) is compulsory. Employers are responsible for providing employees with masks.
- Wearing a face mask in **outdoor public spaces** is mandatory in Paris and in several other French cities, including Lyon, Lille, Marseille, Bordeaux, Nice, and Toulouse.\(^{27}\)

**Croatia**
- Facemasks mandatory in **closed spaces, restaurants and cafes**. \(^{28}\)
- It is mandatory for passengers to wear masks on **public transport, taxis, shops and other commercial premises**. \(^{29}\)

**Hungary**
- It is mandatory to wear a face mask on **public transport and in shops, taxis, cinemas, theatres, concert halls, health and social care institutions, and public offices**. Compliance with the rules is monitored and violators can face a fine. \(^{30}\)
- Wearing mask is mandatory at **football matches and open air events**. \(^{31}\)

**Italy**
- Mask are **mandatory when outside the home and not in an isolated area**, in confined spaces where the 1m social distance cannot be guaranteed and on public transport. \(^{32}\)
- The use of masks is mandatory in **all public spaces, whether outdoors or indoors**. \(^{33}\)

**Lithuania**\(^{34}\)
- Face masks are **mandatory in public, both indoors and outdoors**. Exemptions: if practising or instructing sports, sitting at a table in a bar or restaurant, performing at events, or in the countryside (if there is no one within 20 metres of your group).
- Mandatory to wear a mask or face covering in taxis and on public transport.

\(^{24}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
\(^{26}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
\(^{27}\) https://fr.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information/
\(^{28}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
\(^{29}\) https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/croatia/coronavirus
\(^{30}\) https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/hungary/coronavirus
\(^{31}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
\(^{32}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
\(^{33}\) https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/italy/coronavirus
\(^{34}\) https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/lithuania/coronavirus
**Luxembourg**\(^{35}\)
- Face masks are mandatory in supermarkets, shops and other places which are open to the public, on public transport and on entering restaurants and cafés.
- Face masks mandatory in *Christmas market tents* except when seated in a food tent.

**Latvia**\(^{36}\)
- Face masks are mandatory in *indoor public places*, including those with personalised seating arrangements and suitable social distancing.
- Facemasks are mandatory in the airport for everyone above the age of 7.

**Malta**\(^{37}\)
- Masks are mandatory in *all public spaces, indoor and outdoor* (under 3s are exempt).
  - Exemptions are provided including for those with certified medical conditions; children in kindergarten; during high intensity physical activity; when seated in restaurants.

**Netherlands**\(^{38}\)
- Mandatory to wear a facemask in *public indoor areas* (incl. shops and restaurants) and on *public transport*.
- Mandatory to wear facemasks during check-in, security/passport procedures, and while boarding at Schiphol Airport.

**Poland**\(^{39}\)
- 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, at the doctor’s, clinic, hospital, massage and tattoo parlour, in church and school, at university, in the public office (if you go to run errands there) and other public buildings.
- Masks *not mandatory to wear in the forest, parks, botanical gardens, family allotments and beaches*.

**Portugal**
- Masks are mandatory in *public places and at family events*.\(^{40}\)
- Obligatory use of face masks in *enclosed spaces, and outdoors where a social distance of 2m cannot be maintained*. Mandatory on all forms of *public transport and private hire*.\(^{41}\)

**Romania**
- Masks required in *enclosed public spaces/indoors* and on *public transport*.\(^{42}\)

**Slovenia**
- Masks are mandatory in *public spaces*.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{35}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October  
\(^{36}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October  
\(^{38}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October  
\(^{40}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October  
\(^{41}\) [https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/portugal/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/portugal/coronavirus)  
\(^{42}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October  
\(^{43}\) DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
• Protective masks must be worn in all indoor and outdoor public areas and on public transport.44

Slovakia45
• Wearing a face covering in public spaces in outdoor areas is mandatory if a minimum distance of 2 m from other people cannot be maintained.
• Wearing a face covering in enclosed spaces outside your domicile still applies (also on public transport).

Switzerland46
• Masks are mandatory for those attending political demonstrations and on public transport.
• Wearing a facemask is compulsory in indoor public places such as shops, banks, post offices, museums, libraries and cinemas.
• Wearing a facemask is also required in outdoor zones where social distancing cannot be observed, including establishments such as markets, shops, venues, restaurants, bars.47

Iceland4849
• Face masks should be used in public transport, shops and other services.
• Face masks should also be used where it is not possible to ensure a 2 meter proximity restriction, such as in healthcare, taxis and group cars.

Norway5051
• Mask wearing is not uniform nationally but varies by municipality with mask wearing recommended in municipalities with higher infection levels/increased risk of community transmission.
  o mandatory on public transport to/from/within the region
  o mandatory indoors in public places (shops, shopping centres) where it is not possible to maintain a distance of at least one metre between people
  o mandatory indoors in establishments serving food and drink for all employees and guests in all situations in which the guests are not seated at a table
• In areas of little or no known transmission, general recommendations to use face masks are not in place (although people are free to use them).

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44 https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/slovenia/coronavirus
46 DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
47 https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/switzerland/coronavirus
48 DFA – Digest / EU MS Covid 19 Responses 20/27 October
49 https://www.covid.is/grimur-gera-gagn