

Mandatory face coverings and masks - frequently asked questions and answers

Employees who wear a mask should always adhere to hand washing and social distancing guidance. Wearing a mask must not lead to a relaxed attitude to hand washing and social distancing and it is very important to adhere to all the preventative guidance.

A poster is available to promote the mandatory requirement to wear a face covering. [Click here](#). Please put the poster in entrances to buildings and in visible places around the unit.

When do I need to wear a face covering?

It is mandatory to wear a face covering in all Royal Mail Group indoor workplaces from Monday 9th November. If you have any specific queries on exemptions you should e-mail the Coronavirus Helpdesk via e-mail coronavirus.support@royalmail.com or Advice and Support on 0345 604 3657.

There is someone in my office that cannot wear a face covering for medical or other reasons what should they do?

We recognise that some employees are unable to wear face coverings for medical or other reasons, and that they are not practical to wear for some activities in certain job roles, e.g. in a call centre where full social distancing measures are in place. **Speak to your line manager if you have questions or concerns.**

Wearing the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard discreetly indicates to people around you including staff, colleagues and health professionals that you may need additional support, help or a little more time. Not all disabilities are visible – some are hidden and not immediately obvious, such as learning difficulties, mental health as well as mobility, speech, visual or hearing impairments. Living with a hidden disability can make daily life more demanding for many people, but it can be difficult for others to identify, acknowledge or understand the challenges you face.

The sunflower lanyard is only intended for people with a hidden disability or an underpinning health condition.

It is not for just general use if you cannot wear a face covering.

For those people with a hidden disability or underpinning health condition wearing the Sunflower is entirely a choice.

It is entirely an employee's choice they may wish to purchase their own lanyards or similar identification to make it clear they are subject to medical or other exemption to wearing a face covering. The web page below gives further detail on this. <https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com/>, other options are available.

[An exemption card can be printed from the UK Government website for those that wish to show one.](#)

I work with an employee who is hard of hearing, they need to lip read to communicate, will there be face coverings provided for them?

Employees who are hard of hearing and who rely on lip reading can share any concerns they may have around face coverings with their line manager and discuss options to resolve any communication barriers. We do understand the communication barrier with opaque face coverings and where colleagues would like to wear a clear face covering these can be purchased locally and claimed back via travel and expenses. Any clear face coverings worn must meet basic safety requirements and be comfortable to wear.

Where can I get a face mask?

Face masks and visors (which should be worn with a face covering where possible) are available for all employees from their manager. Some units may choose to provide protective equipment via a table for self-service. Where masks are made available via a table this should ideally be located as close to the entrance as possible and employees should take care, only touching protective equipment that they will be using. We have good stock of protective equipment including masks and taking multiple items at a time is not required.

Employees may also choose to wear their own personal face coverings but these must not have an exhalation valve.

Should I take multiple masks to ensure I have good personal stock?

We have good stock of masks and there is no requirement to take multiple masks and hold a personal supply.

Can I wear my own face mask or covering with a valve?

Employees may choose to wear their own personal face coverings but these must not have an exhalation valve. The World Health Organisation advice is "These masks are intended for industrial workers to prevent dust and particles from being breathed in as the valve closes on inhale. However, the valve opens on exhale making it easier to breathe but also allowing any virus to funnel through the valve opening, making the mask ineffective at preventing the spread of COVID-19."

It has been identified by risk assessment that I need to wear a specific mask do I still need to?

Yes. Any PPE (Identified as a control through risk assessment) should continue to be worn.

Will we be provided with face coverings that can be recycled?

For comfort and to protect the environment, we will be providing re-usable face coverings from early 2021, once stocks of disposables are utilised. A quantity of disposable face coverings will continue to be available.

When reusable face coverings are available, we will communicate it.

What about employees who refuse to wear a face covering?

Managers should contact Advice and Support on 0345 6043657 with questions related to employees who refuse to wear a face covering in indoor settings. The key message is to engage employees in understanding the importance of wearing face coverings as an additional protective measure. **We should respect that some employees may not want to give specific medical information relating to an exemption.**

Why are face coverings important?

Coronavirus (COVID-19) usually spreads by droplets from coughs, sneezes and speaking. These droplets can also be picked up from surfaces, if you touch a surface and then your face without washing your hands first. This is why social distancing, regular hand hygiene, and covering coughs and sneezes is so important in controlling the spread of the virus. Wearing a face covering can help us stay safe by reducing the risk of infection. This is even more important in situations where social distancing is difficult, with the onset of the flu season and where we meet new people, e.g. when new temporary colleagues join us over the Christmas peak.

Where else are face coverings mandatory?

Face coverings are mandatory across the UK in all shops (including Post Offices) and when using public transport.

Customer Service Points (CSPs) are classified as shops for the purposes of this guidance and therefore all customers using these facilities, will need to wear a face mask/covering.

Posters to display this requirement for customers are available on the [SHE Coronavirus Document Library – Posters](#).

The law provides discretion to people who have a health condition, a disability and other groups. These will not always be visible, so staff should continue to serve all who enter CSPs, including those not wearing face coverings. This also applies to employees who may be exempt from wearing a face covering/mask.

How do I wear and dispose of a face covering or mask?

- Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Cover mouth and nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask.
- Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it is damp and do not re-use single-use masks.

How to remove and dispose of a mask:

- To remove the mask, remove it from behind (do not touch the front of mask).
- Discard immediately in a waste bin, do not place the mask on surfaces or frames.
- Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub.
- Drivers should take a polythene bag with them and dispose of any waste that they generate into it immediately after use and put in the bin in the office when they return.

The masks in are not classified as PPE.

Do I need to wear a face covering while I am sat at my desk or temporarily on the phone?

Even if you are maintaining social distancing and following good hand hygiene you are still required to wear a face covering whilst at your desk.

What is the difference between a face covering a mask and a visor?

Face coverings or masks are essentially the same. If you wear either a face covering or a mask you will meet the requirements of this standard. You need to ensure that the face covering or mask covers both your nose, your mouth and chin. A visor can be worn in addition to a face covering or mask but is not recommended as an alternative.

Are visors classed as a face covering?

We have provided our employees with the option to wear a face visor in addition to a face mask/covering if they wish. For those that cannot wear a face mask/covering a visor is available as an alternative and can be worn on its own.

How often do I need to change a face covering or face mask?

There is no set time nor recommended number of masks you should use each day however if the mask gets dirty, wet or damaged, or if you touch the inside of it, then you should replace it with a new one.

How often do technicians in workshops need to replace their face covering?

There is no set number. It may be necessary for people in these roles to change their masks more frequently than other roles.

Can I provide face masks to our cleaner to use?

Yes, a central decision was made to provide onsite cleaners with masks from the unit they are based at.

I work on my own on a CSS/IMP, does this mean I do not have to wear a face covering?

A face covering must be worn at all times indoors except when eating or drinking or the in the process of changing a mask. If your role is exempt from wearing a face covering your manager will inform you. There are very few of these roles currently.

I am worried about disclosing my health condition so that I can have exemption to not wear a face covering, what should I do?

We are mandating face coverings as an additional control measure to minimise the spread of the infection, our expectation is that all employees will comply with this standard. Where employees cannot wear a face covering for medical or other reasons the employee should inform their manager. However, they do not need to disclose personal medical information.

I have a contractor on site who is on site who is refusing to wear a face covering?

We expect our contractors to adhere to our standards. We can refuse access to our buildings if a contractor is refusing to carry out the reasonable instruction and wear a face covering. In situations where a contractor is a leaseholder on our site, we can only enforce the requirement to wear a face covering when they are on our premises or mutually shared premises. If they have their own building on our premises, they are responsible for their own working practices on this part of the site. If they cannot wear a facemask due to an exemption, then we would allow them access.

What are the long-term effects of wearing a facemask at work?

Reliable sources inform us that there are no long-term effects from wearing a face covering. We continue to monitor changes to guidance from reliable sources and will reflect and adopt our policies accordingly if required.

Does wearing glasses, contact lenses or having a beard have an effect on being able to wear a face covering for prolonged periods?

We would expect everyone to wear a face covering. Where this leads to additional health and safety risk you should discuss this with your manager. Face coverings have been worn by a number of professions for long periods of time, so it is a reasonable request to expect our employees to be able to wear a face covering.

Wearing a face covering makes my glasses steam up, what should I do?

1. Wash your glasses in soapy water, wipe the excess water off and let them dry, this will leave a film over the glasses that helps prevent them steaming up.
2. Pull the mask up so that it covers just under your glasses (use tape to hold it in place if that helps).
3. Make sure the mask fits properly, adjust the loops at the back to ensure the mask is tight enough.
4. Warm up your glasses before putting on your mask by putting them in your pocket or rubbing them with a cloth.



Why are we not purchasing re-useable face coverings?

We have purchased a large stock of disposable face masks. Once that supply is exhausted, we will be purchasing re-useable masks.

Who will provide masks for agency employees?

Agency employees will be provided with masks from the site where they are working.

The face mask I am wearing is very difficult for me to wear as I complete strenuous activity and I work near hot equipment. Do I have to wear a mask or face covering?

Everyone must wear a face covering when they are working indoors. If you have a specific medical condition which prevents you from doing this, you should speak to your line manager. If you are feeling faint or unwell you should take some time to sit down, ask a colleague to call a first aider if necessary, for further advice.

An employee in my unit is being negatively challenged for not wearing a face covering, what should I do?

We expect our employees to respect their colleagues and act in a courteous and appropriate way. We are mandating face coverings as an additional control measure to minimise the spread of the infection. Our expectation is that all employees will comply with this standard. Where employees cannot wear a face covering for medical or other reasons the employee should inform their manager. However, they do not need to disclose personal medical information.

Should employees be refused access to a building if they will not wear a face covering?

We have mandated everyone to wear a face covering while working in doors. If there is a reason why individuals cannot do this, they should speak to their line manager.