

Dear Parent/Carer

The Open Academy Encourages the use of Face Coverings — Advice to Parents and Carers

As you may be aware, the government recently changed their advice surrounding the wearing of face coverings in school. The latest guidance, at the time of writing this letter, is below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

Previously the government had said that the wearing of coverings should not be necessary in any school. This has now been updated and the Department for Education has stated; 'Nationwide, while the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary, schools will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas if they believe that is right in their particular circumstances.

In addition, the government will advise additional measures are taken in areas where the transmission of the virus is high. In these areas, defined as areas of national government intervention as listed on gov.uk, the government's guidance will state face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils in secondary schools when moving around the school, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain. It will not be necessary to wear face coverings in the classroom, where protective measures already mean the risks are lower, and where they can inhibit learning. Indeed, in line with the recent guidance, we consider that the wearing of face coverings in classrooms should be avoided.

Our academy has taken a number of precautions to minimise any risk, as outlined in my previous correspondence to you, and my welcome back letter accompanying this communication and as available on our website.

However, I recognise that some students and staff will feel more comfortable wearing a face covering in corridors and communal areas, and we encourage them to do so. As per government guidance, students will not be permitted to wear face coverings in classrooms.

I am sure you can appreciate, reaching this decision on the wearing of face coverings has been challenging given the range of opinions that each of us has about the issue. There are pro's and con's of wearing coverings in a school environment and I have discussed at length, all options available to us with my Senior Leadership Team, the CEO and other officers within DNEAT / St. Benet's MAT. We are all confident that the direction we are taking fits with current government advice and the ethos of our school community.

Please note the following:

- Where masks are worn, these should be as plain as possible and do not carry any advertising or other messages which could be construed as controversial.
- Also, please note any member of staff may request that a mask is removed for identification purposes at any time and we will expect immediate compliance
- Face masks left in classrooms unattended and not in a sealed bag when not worn will be discarded immediately
- Failure to follow the regulations on mask use above will be dealt with through our usual behaviour policy as amended to include our COVID-19 response which can be viewed on our website
- A face covering is something which effectively covers the nose and mouth. It is not classified as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which is used in a limited number of settings to protect wearers against hazards and risks. You can buy reusable or single-use face coverings.

1. A face covering should:
 - a. Cover your nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably.
 - b. Fit comfortably but securely against the side of the face.
 - c. Be secured to the head with ties or ear loops.
 - d. Be made of a material that you find to be comfortable and breathable, such as cotton.
 - e. Ideally include at least two layers of fabric (the World Health Organisation recommends three depending on the fabric used).
 - f. Unless disposable, 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.

2. When wearing a face covering you should:
 - a. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on.
 - b. Avoid wearing on your neck or forehead.
 - c. Avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could be contaminated with the virus.
 - d. Change the face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it.
 - e. Avoid taking it off and putting it back on a lot in quick succession.

3. When removing a face covering:
 - a. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing.
 - b. Only handle the straps, ties or clips.
 - c. Do not give it to someone else to use.
 - d. If single use, dispose of it carefully in a residual waste bin and do not recycle.
 - e. If reusable, wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric,
 - f. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed.
 - g. Once removed, store reusable face coverings in a sealable plastic bag until you have an opportunity to wash them.
 - h. If the face covering is single use, dispose of it in a residual waste bin. Do not put it in a recycling bin.

I thank you for support and will review this decision in light of any updated government guidance and any changes in the local situation. Please note that further information for parents on returning to school can be found at <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-andhow-we-work/campaigns/back-to-school>

What to do if your child develops symptoms of COVID-19

If your child develops symptoms of COVID-19, they should remain at home for at least 7 days from the date when their symptoms appeared. We would also recommend getting a test as soon as possible. Information on testing is available via the links below:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/ask-for-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>

<http://www.nnuh.nhs.uk/our-services/covid-19-testing-key-workers/>

All other household members who remain well must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days.

The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

Household members should not go to work, school or public areas and exercise should be taken within the home.

By household members staying at home for 14 days you will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.

If you are able you should, move any vulnerable individuals (such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions) out of your home, to stay with friends or family for the duration of the home isolation period

Further information on isolation is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>

If your child is isolating due to developing symptoms themselves, or due the household isolation or being identified as a close contact please let us know as soon as possible in the same way you normally report absence. This will help us to take the right precautions at the setting.

Symptoms of COVID-19

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild illness.

If your child or anyone in the household does develop symptoms, you can seek advice from NHS 11 at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/check-if-you-have-coronavirus-symptoms/> or by phoning 111.

How to stop COVID-19 spreading

There are things you can do to help reduce the risk of you and anyone you live with getting ill with COVID-19.

Do

- Follow the guidance on social distancing,

- wash your hands with soap and water often — do this for at least 20 seconds
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available,
- wash your hands as soon as you get home,
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards.

Further information is available at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Kindest Regards

Jon Ford