

Face Coverings

READER INFORMATION	
Title	Face Coverings
Document Purpose and key uses	To update recommendations for the use of face coverings.
Version 1	9 th November 2020
Produced by/for	Produced on behalf of Public Health Services to provide information to the COVID-19 Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC), the Strategic Gold Command and the Civil Contingencies Authority.
Circulation list	Onward circulation to be determined by Public Health Services. Information to be included on gov.gg/coronavirus
Reporting frequency	One-time ad hoc report
Contributors	Public Health Services and STAC
AMENDMENT HISTORY	
Officer	Nicola Brink: Approved by STAC on the 9 th November 2020

1. Background

The Bailiwick of Guernsey currently has no evidence of community transmission of COVID-19. However, the islands remain at risk of a resurgence of COVID-19 through imported cases. Our strategic goal is to prevent the emergence of new transmission chains originating from cases that arrive from outside the Bailiwick. Border controls are in place to manage the number of potentially infected people arriving here in order to reduce risk of onward transmission from someone who was asymptomatic on arrival.

The COVID-19 assessment and testing service remains in place and anyone developing symptoms of possible COVID-19 (whether or not they have a history of recent travel) is encouraged to present for assessment, and testing if appropriate. The Contact Tracing Service also continues in skeleton form (with surge capacity arrangements in place) so that any sporadic imported case can be contained with no, or only very limited, onwards transmission.



Our COVID-19 free status has enabled us to move to Phase 5 in our 'Exit from Lockdown' response plan. This means that island life has effectively returned to normal with removal of social distancing and restrictions on gatherings and the re-opening of schools, business, hospitality and leisure facilities.

The COVID-19 'Exit from Lockdown Framework' sets out how social distancing and other control measures would be re-introduced if we see a return to community transmission (i.e. cases that cannot be clearly linked to travel). Of further consideration is whether face coverings (non-medical masks) should be considered in high risk 'economic' settings. Or indeed in the community to reduce transmission.

Since April 2020, the COVID19.gov.gg website has included information for the public on the use of face coverings in the community. Of importance is that the evidence suggests that wearing a face covering can reduce transmission from an infected person (including those with no symptoms) to others and that this is particularly relevant in busy, enclosed spaces. At present, with no evidence of virus circulating in the community, there is no immediate need to revise or strengthen this guidance. However, we should consider what changes should be ready to put in place in the event of a resurgence of COVID-19 on Island.

Since April, further evidence has accrued about the prevalence of asymptomatic infection. This means that even if people continue to adhere to guidance to self-isolate/stay at home if they have symptoms, there remains a significant risk that people may unwittingly transmit infection to others. The increased risk of transmission in enclosed, crowded situations compared to outdoors has also been recognised. This has led to many jurisdictions strengthening guidance on the use of face coverings and/or mandating their use in certain situations.

2. Current guidance and regulations in other jurisdictions in the British Isles

In England, face coverings are mandatory in shops, supermarkets, other specified indoor public places, on public transport and in NHS settings. In Scotland, face coverings are mandatory in shops and other specified settings, on public transport and in railway stations, bus stations and airports. Wearing a mask is recommended in other enclosed spaces where physical distancing is difficult and where there is a risk of close contact with multiple people who are not members of one household. In Northern Ireland, face coverings are mandatory on public transport and the NI Executive has regulations in place to enable the mandating of face coverings in a number of indoor settings should this be deemed appropriate. Wales



has currently limited the mandatory use of face coverings to public transport.¹ Ireland also now mandates the use of face coverings on public transport and in a range of shops and other settings.²

3. Conclusions

Since the current guidance on face coverings was issued in April 2020, further evidence on asymptomatic spread and high-risk environments has accrued. In response, many jurisdictions, including the majority within the British Isles, have strengthened their guidance about the use of face coverings, including making use mandatory in certain settings. Whilst we have no community transmission of COVID-19, there is no immediate need to modify the guidance from that already published on gov.gg.

However, given the current levels of infection globally and in neighbouring jurisdictions it is only a matter of time before further cases occur on Island. Whilst we have measures in place to manage the risk of transmission from sporadic imported cases (through testing contact tracing and self-isolation), there remains a risk that these may not prevent a resurgence of community transmission. It is, therefore important to ensure that our response plan includes all appropriate mitigations to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It would, therefore, be timely to review current guidance on the use of face coverings in the community, including whether an escalation plan linked to our Exit Framework is now appropriate.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the current Bailiwick of Guernsey guidance on use of face coverings in the community be revised and strengthened in line with updated evidence.

A proposal for linking guidance to the levels of the COVID-19 transmission is attached at Appendix 1.

¹ <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#:~:text=children%20under%20the%20age%20of,illness%20or%20impairment%2C%20or%20disability>

² https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/health/covid19/face_coverings_during_covid19.html



Appendix 1.

Framework linking guidance on use of face coverings in the community to the levels in the COVID-19 Response plan.

Level	COVID-19 transmission	Face covering guidance
1	No community transmission – sporadic imported cases only	No change from present guidance: while there is no evidence of virus circulating in the community, use of face coverings is a personal decision
2	First confirmed case of community transmission that is controlled by track and trace measures	Face coverings remain optional and are a personal decision
3	Virus is circulating in the community (two or more community cases with no causal links identified)	Use of face coverings in enclosed crowded places and on public transport is recommended
4	Sustained spread of virus in the community	Consider mandating / strongly recommending use of face coverings as above
5	Sustained local transmission, multiple transmission chains from unrelated cases, rapid doubling time in number of cases	Consider mandating / strongly recommending use of face coverings as above