

Ask for: Joe McDonnell
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Ref: JM/FaceCoverings
Date: 23 November 2021

Dear Headteacher,

Re-introduction of face coverings in communal areas

As you may be aware, earlier this week the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) published national guidance on wearing face masks in communal settings in secondary schools, and it is now at the discretion of the local Director of Public Health to decide whether this guidance is implemented. The [contingency framework](#) has been updated to reflect this.

Given the consistently high levels of COVID-19 in schools, and low level of vaccination among 12-15 year-olds, I am formally advising schools in Waltham Forest that face coverings should **be re-introduced with immediate effect for secondary school pupils and staff in all communal areas, unless they are exempt**. I am aware that this is already in place in a number of schools. I continue to recommend the use of face coverings on dedicated school or college transport.

As we go into winter, I would like to make sure that schools are doing everything to prevent outbreaks, and mask wearing is a key risk reduction measure. A [recent large study](#) showed that mask wearing is a significant way of reducing COVID-19 transmission.

This recommendation is unlikely to be reversed during this half-term, and I will review the situation again in the new year.

I am currently only asking you to apply this measure in communal areas. However, in the event of an outbreak, the new guidance states that the Director of Public Health can also recommend that face coverings are worn in classrooms.

Attached is a template letter that can be used to inform parents and carers of this change. Please feel free to amend as you see fit, including to amend the date from which you will be implementing this change

Measures such as mask wearing are most effective as one of several interventions, so I would take the opportunity to remind schools of the importance of promoting and facilitating twice weekly rapid testing among pupils and staff, and I would encourage schools to promote the ongoing offer of vaccinations to pupils at clinics in the community.

Yours faithfully,

