

COVID-19 Advice on Face Coverings

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
8 th December 2020	3.1	The House of Bishops Recovery Group
Update from version 3: an additional link and paragraph in point 4 has been added to highlight the use of cards and badges for exemptions from wearing face masks.		

The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

This guidance is to help ministers and their congregations to understand the current advice on wearing face coverings, and how this applies in churches. This advice is reflected in the specific Government [guidance](#) for conducting various worship services within enclosed spaces such as church buildings.

Except where otherwise indicated, this is guidance, not instruction; those directly responsible for activities in church and other buildings are advised to make decisions in the light of this and guidance from the Government in accordance with their specific circumstances.

1. Should I wear a face covering in a church building?

Face coverings are currently mandatory on public transport and in a range of indoor venues including places of worship and church halls. While there are exemptions, outlined below, **this is a legal requirement**.

2. What is a face covering?

A face covering is something which safely covers the nose and mouth. You can buy reusable or single-use face coverings. You may also use a scarf, bandana, religious garment or hand-made cloth covering but these must securely fit round the side of the face.

These are different from surgical and other face masks that are part of PPE used in health and social care settings. We do not recommend the use of PPE in church buildings other than for specialist cleaning activities.

3. Why should we wear face coverings?

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can spread predominantly by droplets and perhaps aerosols (which can linger in the air) from coughs, sneezes and speaking. The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering can reduce the spread of coronavirus droplets and aerosols in certain circumstances, helping to protect others.

Because face coverings are mainly intended to protect others, not the wearer, from coronavirus (COVID-19) they are not a replacement for physical distancing and regular hand washing.

4. Who is exempt from wearing a face covering?

You do not need to wear a face covering if you have a legitimate reason not to. This includes:

- Those who are leading services or events in a place of worship, and those who assist them (for instance by reading, preaching, or leading prayer) do not always need to wear a face covering, although one should be worn especially if physical distancing cannot be maintained (i.e. distributing consumables) *This exemption does not apply to worshippers, who should wear face coverings consistent with the requirements for any other public space.*
- These exemptions will also cover the bride and groom at a wedding and those officiating at the wedding.
- These exemptions are made to enable communication, particularly with those who rely on lip-reading, facial expressions or clear sound; they do not exempt clergy and other leaders from wearing face coverings in other situations or during other activities.

There are a range of other reasons for not wearing a face covering, including:

- young children under the age of 11
- not being able to put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability
- if putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause you severe distress
- if you are travelling with or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading to communicate
- to avoid harm or injury, or the risk of harm or injury, to yourself or others
- to avoid injury, or to escape a risk of harm, and you do not have a face covering with you
- to eat or drink, but only if you need to
- to take medication
- if a police officer or other official requests you remove your face covering

There are also scenarios when you are permitted to remove a face covering when asked:

- If asked to do so by shop staff for the purpose of age identification
- If speaking with people who rely on lip reading, facial expressions and clear sound. Some may ask you, either verbally or in writing, to remove a covering to help with communication.

Although you don't need to prove you're exempt from wearing a face mask there are cards and badges to help show others why you aren't wearing a mask, which could provide peace of mind. The gov.uk website shows a range of such cards and badges including some that ask people to remove their mask so that you can lip read.

Read more at : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

5. How should I wear a face covering?

A face covering should:

- cover your nose and mouth while allowing you to breathe comfortably
- fit comfortably but securely against the side of the face
- be secured to the head with ties or ear loops
- be made of a material that you find to be comfortable and breathable, such as cotton
- ideally include at least two layers of fabric (the World Health Organisation recommends three depending on the fabric used)
- unless disposable, it should 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

When wearing a face covering you should:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on
- avoid wearing on your neck or forehead
- avoid touching the part of the face covering in contact with your mouth and nose, as it could be contaminated with the virus
- change the face covering if it becomes damp or if you've touched it

When removing a face covering:

- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before removing
- only handle the straps, ties or clips
- do not share with someone else to use
- if single-use, dispose of it carefully in a residual waste bin and do not recycle
- if reusable, wash it in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed.

6. How do I wear a face covering if distributing or receiving Holy Communion?

Face coverings should be worn by the president and anyone assisting at the time of distribution of the consecrated bread.

Face coverings need not be worn by worshippers when they consume the consecrated bread.

For detailed guidance, please read our document on Advice for Administering Holy Communion.

7. How can I make a face covering?

If you want to [make your own face covering](#), instructions are widely available online. If you would like more information on how to make a face covering with materials from around your home please visit the [Big Community Sew website](#).

8. How can I store or dispose of a face covering safely?

Do not touch the front of the face covering, or the part of the face covering that has been in contact with your mouth and nose.

Once removed, store reusable face coverings in a plastic bag until you have an opportunity to wash them. If the face covering is single use, dispose of it in a residual waste bin. Do not put them in a recycling bin.

Make sure you clean any surfaces the face covering has touched using normal household cleaning products.

Wash your face covering regularly and follow the washing instructions for the fabric. You can use your normal detergent. You can wash and dry it with other laundry. You must throw away your face covering if it is damaged.

Do not touch the front of the face covering, or the part of the face covering that has been in contact with your mouth and nose.

Once removed, store reusable face coverings in a plastic bag until you have an opportunity to wash them. If the face covering is single use, dispose of it in a residual waste bin. Do not put them in a recycling bin.

Make sure you clean any surfaces the face covering has touched using normal household cleaning products. If eating in a restaurant, for example, it is important that you do not place the face covering on the table.

Wash your face covering regularly and follow the washing instructions for the fabric. You can use your normal detergent. You can wash and dry it with other laundry. You must throw away your face covering if it is damaged.

For more information go to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

