

## **Solent University Face Coverings Policy**

### **Executive Summary**

Face coverings are mainly intended to protect others and not the wearer. When used correctly, they cover the nose and mouth, which are the main sources of transmitting coronavirus (COVID-19).

The risk of COVID infection at work must be managed by following the hierarchy of controls. Face coverings are not classed as personal protective equipment (PPE). Activity specific risk assessments will dictate when PPE should be worn.

There is a requirement to wear face coverings in designated areas of the campus, as a precautionary measure where social distancing measure may be impacted. These include common areas, C-store, Costa, the Deli and the Dock. You are expected to wear a face covering before entering any of these settings and must keep it on until you leave unless there is a reasonable excuse for removing it, such as eating or drinking.

There are some circumstances where people may not be able to wear a face covering. It is important to be mindful and respectful of such circumstances, noting that some people are less able to wear face coverings, and that the reasons for this may not be visible to others. Solent University will support the wearing of Sunflower lanyards, which signifies that the wearer has a hidden disability and may need additional support.

### **Policy**

Staff, students, visitors, contractors, and members of the public should wear face coverings in common areas of University buildings. The aim of the face covering is to form a barrier to virus-filled droplets that are coughed, sneezed or simply breathed out when talking. Face coverings are an additional measure in the fight against COVID-19 and help to protect others.

For the purpose of this policy, a face covering will typically be a cloth covering for the nose and mouth.

Social distancing at 2m (or 1m plus with additional precautions) remains a key feature of the hygiene and safety measures that the University has in place. It is important to point out that face coverings are not a substitute for this. The use of face coverings should be seen to complement additional control measures such as being tested when displaying symptoms, self-isolating when unwell or advised to, enhanced cleaning regimes, and regular handwashing.

Increasing evidence has shown that wearing face coverings can reduce transmission of Covid-19 from an infected person to others. This is also very appropriate for someone who is asymptomatic, showing no outward symptoms of the virus. Therefore, the wearing of face coverings is to be considered a social responsibility for those who can wear them, with the aim of providing increased reassurance to all members, including those most vulnerable to serious illness.

All staff, students, contractors and visitors who are not exempt should have a clean face covering readily available. Face coverings should be worn before entering any University building and continue to be worn in the communal areas, including offices other than your own. Exemptions for individuals and exceptions for particular settings are set out below.

The policy comes into effect on 28th September 2020, although Faculties and Services may wish to adopt the policy sooner than that. The policy will be kept under regular review by the Return to Campus Group.

## FAQ's

### 1. Who does the policy apply to?

The policy applies to all staff, students, visitors, contractors, and members of the public across all University buildings, except those who are exempt from wearing face coverings.

### 2. Are there any exemptions to who needs to wear a face covering?

In line with the exemptions that apply in public spaces, such as on public transport and in shops, the requirement to wear face coverings in University buildings will not apply to those who have a legitimate reason. This includes:

- 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 severe distress
- where interacting with someone who uses lip reading to communicate, or who has social communication impairments
- children aged under 11 years (e.g. when in public spaces)

### 3. Do I need to provide evidence that I am exempt from wearing a face covering?

There is no requirement to provide evidence that you have a legitimate reason not to wear a face covering, or that you may require others to briefly remove theirs so that you can understand them (e.g. to lip read). Some people may feel more comfortable showing something that says they do not have to wear a face covering. This could be in the form of an exemption card, badge, lanyard or even a homemade sign (some examples are shown on the Government COVID-19 pages). This is a personal choice and is not required.

Staff or students who are exempt from wearing face coverings may wear a Sunflower Lanyard. This is a helpful way for a person to show that they are exempt or have a hidden disability. It will also help to prevent being asked to wear a face covering or being challenged for not wearing one. The wearing of a Sunflower Lanyard is a personal choice and is not mandatory.



Students who are exempt from wearing a face covering may obtain a Sunflower Lanyard from Access Solent, if they decide to wear one on campus. Staff should contact their P&D Business Partner.

In the absence of any outward indication that the person has an exemption, it is appropriate to ask people politely if they would be able to wear a face covering. However, it is not appropriate to challenge someone who is not wearing a face covering. It should be assumed that there is a legitimate reason why they cannot.

**4. Where will I be required to wear a face covering?**

Face coverings should be worn (except by those who are exempt) when entering University and buildings and in all shared indoor spaces. This includes communal and circulation spaces, research laboratories and workshops, libraries and offices other than your own. Face coverings should also be worn when travelling with others in a University owned or hired vehicle and in other settings required by current legislation.

Within the Residence's, students must wear face coverings when entering or exiting the residences and enroute to their study bedroom/household area. The wearing of a face covering within the household kitchen space is advised for the protection of others. Students must vacate these spaces when cleaners/maintenance arrive to carry out cleaning or maintenance tasks.

**5. Are there any exceptions where face coverings are not required?**

There are limited specific exceptions set out in the policy where face coverings can be removed. These include when alone in single occupancy offices, or when seated at a desk in a shared office (provided in all cases 2m social distancing is consistently maintained). This is because where face-to-face interaction, such as speaking with others, and movement around the space are minimised, then the risk of transmission is reduced. In addition, in these settings you are less likely to be in contact with people that you do not normally meet. Face coverings do not need to be worn when eating or drinking in certain areas, provided that 2m social distancing is consistently maintained. However, they should be worn in catering areas such as the East Park Deli, Costa and the Dock, until such time as being seated in readiness to consume the food or drink.

In addition, they do not need to be worn by staff working in settings with protective screens in place such as reception areas, or in student accommodation where students are living in defined household groups, or when communicating with someone who uses lip reading (when 2m social distancing should still be maintained).

Contract staff working in catering outlets and shops within University buildings are required to wear face coverings, in addition to any screens that may be fitted.

Contract partners may operate within the controls specified in their task based risk assessments.

**6. Does wearing a face covering mean that 2m social distancing is not required?**

Face coverings are not a substitute for hygiene and safety measures such as self-isolating when unwell, social distancing, enhanced cleaning regimes, and regular hand-washing, and these primary mitigation measures should always be followed. Face coverings are an additional measure that those in University are required to wear out of consideration for and to provide reassurance to others, particularly those who might be more vulnerable.

It is important to note that the definition of a contact of an infected person under the NHS Test and Trace system (who would be required to self-isolate for 14 days) does not take into account whether face coverings were worn, and so 2m distancing from others should be maintained wherever possible.

It should be noted that some individuals might struggle to maintain 2m social distancing for disability-related reasons (e.g. visual impairment or spatial awareness).

**7. What is the difference between a face mask and a face covering?**

A face mask is a form of personal protective equipment (PPE), such as a fluid-resistant surgical mask, typically used in healthcare settings. An activity specific risk assessment would identify circumstances in which face masks are required to be worn as PPE. Face coverings are not a form of PPE and are typically cloth coverings for the nose and mouth.

**8. What should I do if I am concerned that someone is not wearing a face covering?**

Signage informing and reminding people of the requirement to wear face coverings should be displayed prominently on entering buildings and around the building. It is important to remember that some people will have legitimate reasons why they are not able to wear a face covering. Some of these reasons may be hidden and people should not be asked if they have an exemption, or the reasons for it.

**9. What should I do if someone asks me to remove my face covering to aid communication?**

Some people rely on lip reading or facial cues to aid communication, and wearing of face coverings by others can make this difficult or impossible. If someone asks you to remove your face covering to assist their communication then you should do so, paying particular attention to maintaining 2m social distancing during this period.

It is possible that the use of face coverings with transparent panels over the mouth could be useful for some people in some settings. The University is investigating the effectiveness and availability of such coverings.

**10. What sort of face covering should I wear?**

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
- include at least two layers of fabric as a minimum. The face covering may include a clear panel to allow for lip reading and facial clues to aid communication.
- 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

**11. How should I put on and remove a face covering?**

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 become 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, store it in a plastic bag and take it home to wash
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser once removed

The BBC has produced a simple video on 'how to wear a covering and inhibit coronavirus' that staff and students may find useful:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/explainers-53517968>

## **12. How should I look after and/or dispose of my face covering?**

You should wash reusable face coverings after each time it is worn, in line with manufacturer's instructions at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric.

You can dispose of used disposable face coverings in a designated PPE bin, please do not put them in a recycling bin.

If you do not have regular access to laundry facilities, you can hand wash your face covering with soap that is suitable for handwashing items, and hot water.

## **13. Will face coverings be provided to staff and students?**

Staff and students (and contractors, visitors, and members of the public) are responsible for providing their own face coverings for use in University buildings. Faculties and Services may decide to provide face coverings for staff in public-facing roles (i.e. as part of a staff uniform).

Where surgical-type face masks are required, as an item of PPE identified through an activity specific risk assessment, then these will be provided to staff and students where applicable.

## **14. Can I wear a face shield/visor instead of a face covering?**

Visors (also referred to as face shields) are not a suitable alternative to face coverings. The primary purpose of wearing a close-fitting face covering is to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus from an infected person to others. Visors are considered less effective for the purpose of reducing transmission risk to others.

In contrast, visors are used principally to protect the wearer in close-contact situations, for example to protect from splashes of blood or other bodily fluids in the provision of first aid or clinical care. In such cases, an activity specific risk assessment may identify that a visor is an appropriate form of PPE to mitigate a specific risk in conjunction with other forms of PPE, for example used in combination with a fluid-resistant surgical mask.