

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

8th January 2021

Dear Constituent,

RE: FACE COVERINGS.

Thank you for your recent correspondence about the wearing of face coverings during the Coronavirus pandemic; your comments upon which I have read with great interest.

I know that the Government is following scientific guidance to ensure that steps are taken to ensure that people are able to go about their business as safely as possible.

I agree that it is vital to balance the need to restrict the spread of the virus without infringing on civil liberties, while allowing the restoration of economic and social life. Face masks work to facilitate this balance to be struck. It is vital that we do all that we can to protect people, in particular during the resurgence of cases of COVID-19. I know that the Government is keeping all guidelines under constant review to ensure that any restrictions in place are worthwhile measures in the fight against the virus, and I urge my constituents to comply with these measures, as I do.

While I understand that the science in this area has evolved during the outbreak, the body of scientific evidence that has built up shows that the risk of transmission is made lower by wearing a face covering.

Face coverings are not mandatory in public other than in certain situations, like on public transport, in NHS settings and, since the 8th August, in all enclosed spaces where you are likely to come into contact with people from outside your household. You are not required to wear a face covering at all times that you are in public, such as in parks or while exercising.

Rules about face coverings do not mean people should wear surgical masks or respirators, which need to be kept available for those who need to wear them at work. Instead, people should wear the kind of face covering that can easily be made at home. Face coverings should cover the mouth and nose while allowing you to breathe comfortably, and can be as simple as a scarf or bandana that ties behind the head to give a snug fit. Indeed, the Government has published advice for people on how to make their own face coverings at home.

Some people will be exempt from needing to wear a face covering, for example children under the age of 11. Moreover, some people will have a reasonable excuse not to wear one. This would apply, for instance, to a person who has a disability, or a physical or mental illness, or impairment which means they cannot wear a face covering. The full list of exemptions and reasonable excuses can be found at the following link:

<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#when-you-do-not-need-to-wear-a-face-covering>

The Government is now recommending the use of face coverings in all enclosed spaces where you are likely to come into contact with people outside your household.

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I have also read, with interest, reports of researchers seeking to develop face coverings that kill viruses to prevent their reaching the wearer or permeating to the outside world. My understanding is that, while research on some products looks promising, the technology is still awaiting certification. Like us all, I remain extremely impressed by the hard work and innovation of scientists across the globe seeking to defeat this virus, but particularly within the UK, and commend all those who have worked on projects like these.

Businesses already have legal obligations to protect their staff under existing employment law. This means taking appropriate steps to provide a safe working environment, which may include providing face coverings where appropriate, alongside other mitigations such as screens and social distancing. According to Government guidance, where face coverings are required for staff, businesses are expected to provide these as part of their health and safety obligations. However, staff are welcome to use their own face coverings if they choose. You can find more information, here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches#shops-6-1>

I know that some people expressed concern about rumoured health risks of wearing a face covering. However, let me be clear that these claims are false and unsubstantiated. For example, hypoxia, or deprivation of oxygen, is not caused by the breathable materials recommended for face coverings, nor by the prolonged use of medical masks when properly worn in line with recommendations for the product. There is absolutely no evidence that face coverings cause hypercapnia, or too much carbon dioxide in the blood, unless they are entirely air tight: carbon dioxide molecules that you breathe out exit through and around the types of face coverings that are commonly worn. Furthermore, there is no evidence at all to support the claim that face coverings can suppress the body's immune system - they may stop germs getting into your mouth or nose so that the immune system does not have to kick in, but this is not the same as it being suppressed. I believe it is extremely irresponsible for people to promote these myths in any forum, particularly on social media where they have been widely shared, when there is an increasing body of evidence to show that face coverings can reduce the spread of Coronavirus, and as such, can save lives.

I hope that these measures will help to restore confidence and also add further protection to enable people to go about their daily business. However, it is important to keep in mind that this measure is in addition to the existing safety measures, including regular hand washing and observing social distancing.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,
Tom

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