



MEMO TO EARLY LEARNING AND CARE (ELC) AND SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE (SAC) PROVIDERS, INCLUDING CHILDMINDERS, 1ST DECEMBER 2021

Throughout the course of the pandemic, very few outbreaks of Covid-19 have been detected in ELC/SAC and childminding settings, and this is testament to all staff in ELC/SAC settings and childminders in continuing to follow and implement infection prevention and control measures. During the course of the pandemic, it has also been the case that children have been more likely to have mild or asymptomatic infections.

In the current stage of the pandemic, we are experiencing a high incidence rate of COVID-19 in children aged 5-12 years. It is often difficult to detect Covid-19 outbreaks in ELC/SAC or schools settings due to the relative lack of symptoms in children, and therefore asymptomatic spread of Covid-19 may be occurring in these settings. In order to try and reduce transmission among these age groups and among ELC/SAC sector and school staff, the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and the Government issued [Interim Guidance on the use of face coverings in Childcare and Educational Settings](#) on the 30th of November 2021.

This latest advice recommends the wearing of face masks/coverings in children in the following situations:

- Children aged 9 years and over on public transport, in retail and other indoor public settings, with exemptions as appropriate
- Children in third class and above in primary educational settings
- In certain situations, the use of clear visors should be considered, for example staff interacting with children with hearing difficulties or learning difficulties. However, it is accepted that visors are less effective than face-coverings in preventing transmission.

For the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, including childminding sector, the updated advice published on the 30th of November means the following changes:

- At this point in time there is no change in the public health guidance on adults wearing masks in ELC/SAC settings: staff members, parents and visitors should all wear face masks/coverings when not caring for children and where social distancing is not possible.
- In line with the Interim Guidance issued on 30th November, it has been advised that children 9 years of age and older should wear face masks/coverings when it does not interfere with their care and active engagement.
- On this basis, the use of face masks/coverings for children 9 years of age and older in ELC/SAC settings is not mandatory but advised. Therefore, settings will have to use their professional judgement in relation to operationalising the guidance in consultation with parents.
- During transport to and from ELC and SAC services, face masks/coverings should be worn by children over 9 years of age where this is not a barrier to communication with the driver or those caring for them.



The HPSC has stated that cloth face coverings **should not** be worn by any of the following groups:

- Children aged < 9 years of age in primary educational settings or pre-school.
- Any person with difficulty breathing or other relevant medical conditions.
- Any person who is unconscious or incapacitated.
- Any person who is unable to remove the face-covering without assistance.
- Any person who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering, for example persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

Early Years Communications Team

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