



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein Cyf/Our Ref: ATISN 15096

21 May 2021

Dear

## **ATISN 15096 – Facemasks in a school environment**

### **Information requested**

Thank you for your request which I received on Monday 26 April 2021. You asked for:

1. All documents held by Welsh Government relating to scientific evidence that wearing a face covering stops the spread of viruses in schools.
2. All documents held by Welsh Government relating to risk assessments relating to the decision taken for children and young people of statutory school age to wear a face covering in school, and any risks identified to the health and well-being of children and young people of statutory school age of wearing a face covering in school.
3. Evidence held by Welsh Government that wearing a face covering over a prolonged period in school will not cause hypercapnia, hypercarbia, or respiratory acidosis in the wearer.
4. Evidence held by Welsh Government that wearing a face covering over a prolonged period in school does not harmfully reduce levels of oxygen for the wearer.
5. Evidence held by Welsh Government that wearing a face covering over a prolonged period in school has no adverse effects on the wearer from inhaling carbon dioxide and other toxins that are expelled via the nose and mouth.

### **Our response**

The Welsh Government's policy and guidance on face coverings in schools and education settings and more generally can be found here:

- [schools coronavirus guidance](#)
- [operational guidance for schools and settings](#)
- [staying safe and social distancing](#)

The information you requested which is held by Welsh Government is enclosed.

### **1. All documents held by Welsh Government relating to scientific evidence that wearing a face covering stops the spread of viruses in schools.**

*Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.*

*We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.*

The Welsh Government's approach is informed by the evidence and its evaluation by the Welsh Government Technical Advisory Cell (TAC) (also Technical Advisory Group (TAG)). The advice and its evaluation has not ever stated that face coverings stop the spread of viruses entirely on their own. Rather, face coverings are one part of a toolkit of protective behaviours. Mitigation measures which are implemented at a system or organisational level should always take precedence over those that rely on personal compliance. The TAC information is published. The relevant information to your request is identified here.

#### TAC / TAG Papers: hierarchy of risk

[Technical Advisory Cell: use of face coverings in the context of COVID-19, June 2020](#)

[Technical Advisory Group: advice on return to school, July 2020](#)

[Technical Advisory Group: advice on school transport, August 2020](#)

[Technical Advisory Group: updated advice on face coverings, August 2020](#)

[Technical Advisory Group: face coverings for children and young people in education settings, August 2020](#)

[Technical Advisory Group: evidence review on children and young people under 18 in preschool, school or college following the firebreak, November 2020](#)

[Technical Advisory Group: considerations for changing the operation of schools to allow more face-to-face learning, February 2021](#)

#### [Cardiff University: Modelling Airborne Transmission of COVID-19](#)

#### SAGE papers

[Evidence of environmental dispersion of COVID-19 for different mechanisms, 14 April 2020](#)

[DELVE: Report on face masks for the general public, 21 April 2020](#)

[Susceptibility and transmission in children: updates from the last few weeks, 29 April 2020](#)

[NERVTAG/EMG: Duration of wearing of face coverings, 15 September 2020](#)

[EMG: Role of ventilation in controlling SARS-CoV-2 transmission, 30 September 2020](#)

[TFC: Children and transmission, 4 November 2020](#)

[TFC: Children and transmission - update paper, 17 December 2020](#)

[EMG: Application of physical distancing and fabric face coverings in mitigating the B117 variant SARS-CoV-2 virus in public, workplace and community, 13 January 2021](#)

[TFC: Children and transmission - update paper, 10 February 2021](#)

[Comix Report Survey Week 55](#)

#### World Health Organization information

World Health Organization advice: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): [Children and masks](#) including Advice on the use of masks for [children in the community](#) in the context of COVID-19.

- 2. All documents held by Welsh Government relating to risk assessments relating to the decision taken for children and young people of statutory school age to wear a face covering in school, and any risks identified to the health and well-being of children and young people of statutory school age of wearing a face covering in school.**

The Welsh Government recommends, but does not mandate the use of face coverings in secondary schools and secondary school age settings. This should be subject to a local risk assessment in the school or setting. The Welsh Government does not hold records of risk assessments undertaken in schools and settings.

Schools are under a duty to take all reasonable measures to minimise the risk of exposure to coronavirus. The use of face coverings, by staff and learners, where relevant, can be one of those measures.

The Welsh Government recognises there are circumstances where face coverings are not appropriate, and due to specific individual needs and local circumstances, this is for the school or setting to discuss with the individual learner, supported by their local risk assessment.

Welsh Government assessments of how our measures to manage COVID-19 affect the equality of opportunity are published [here](#). At the time of writing the impact assessment for the phased return to face to face teaching (22 February 2021) is published [here](#) and the equivalent impact assessments for the stages of phased return on 15 March and 12 April are awaiting publication and provided below. These consider the impact of interventions more generally, including face coverings.



EIA - Education - Phased reopening



EIA - Education - Phased reopening

Children's rights impact assessments on the phased return to face to face teaching for the same periods are available here:



CRIA - Phased reopening of schools



CRIA - Education - Phased reopening



CRIA - Education - Phased reopening

- 3. Evidence held by Welsh Government that wearing a face covering over a prolonged period in school will not cause hypercapnia, hypercarbia, or respiratory acidosis in the wearer.**
- 4. Evidence held by Welsh Government that wearing a face covering over a prolonged period in school does not harmfully reduce levels of oxygen for the wearer.**
- 5. Evidence held by Welsh Government that wearing a face covering over a prolonged period in school has no adverse effects on the wearer from inhaling carbon dioxide and other toxins that are expelled via the nose and mouth.**

The Welsh Government does not hold the information you request under points 3, 4 and 5.

### Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,  
Welsh Government,  
Cathays Park,  
Cardiff,  
CF10 3NQ

or Email: [Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales](mailto:Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales)

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office,  
Wycliffe House,  
Water Lane,  
Wilmslow,  
Cheshire,  
SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely