20 May 2020

New guidance on face coverings for the general public in Hertfordshire

The government is now advising the public to wear a face covering in some circumstances, such as enclosed spaces where social distancing may not always possible.

Face coverings do not protect you from contracting coronavirus. However, if you are infected but haven't yet developed symptoms, they should help to provide some protection for people you come into contact with in a busy shop or on public transport.

To help people to interpret the government's advice and choose the right face covering for their circumstances, the Public Health team from Hertfordshire County Council has developed guidance for employers and the public.

What is a face covering?
A face covering is made of cloth or other textiles and covers the nose and mouth. You should be able to breathe comfortably through a face covering. You can use a simple scarf or bandana that ties behind your head or make your own 'no-sew' face coverings using the advice available online at the gov.uk website. Simply search for 'face covering'. Face coverings are also available to buy online.

A face covering is not the same as a face mask used within a health and care setting. It is important that face masks are only used by health and care professionals, to ensure that the supply of these masks for key workers who are at particular risk is not reduced.

If you have symptoms of Covid, you (and all members of your household whether they have symptoms or not) must self-isolate promptly. Follow the stay at home guidance, and get tested as soon as possible if you are eligible https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test

Professor Jim McManus, Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council, said:
"Remember, face coverings do not replace social distancing, good hand washing and good hygiene (coughing and sneezing into a tissue, disposing of tissues immediately and washing hands), as these are the most important and effective measures that we can all adopt to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Wearing a face covering is not an alternative to any of these precautions.

"We are urging people not to buy the surgical face masks or respirators worn by front-line workers in health and care settings because these are prioritised for those who are working in environments where the risk is greatest. People who have been advised to use surgical face masks or respirators by Public Health England, their health or care employers or the Hertfordshire Public Health Team should continue to use these."

The safe use of face coverings is crucial. Wash your hands or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, taking it off, washing it and storing it. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth at all times and store used face coverings in a plastic bag until you have an opportunity to wash them. Clean any surfaces your face covering has come into contact with. You should wash your face covering after each use in your usual laundry, using your normal detergent.

The government has advised that face coverings 'do not need to be worn outdoors, while exercising, in schools, in workplaces such as offices and retail'. They are also not recommended for those who may find them difficult to wear, such as children under two, primary aged children who cannot use them without assistance, or those who may have problems breathing while wearing a face covering.

The perception of risk and the level of anxiety about coronavirus varies between different people and there are different cultural attitudes to wearing face coverings. If people choose to wear a face covering within environments such as offices, schools or outdoors, it is important their wishes are respected. It does not necessarily indicate they are unwell or there is an increased risk from that individual.

Frequently asked Questions about face coverings can be viewed here, and further graphics will be promoted across Hertfordshire later this week