

3.07 Face Coverings

Since 13th October 2020, it has been a legal [requirement](#) for all persons to wear a face covering in *Those parts of a building used by a Northern Ireland Department which members of the public are permitted to enter to access services*”

This legislation applies when entering and leaving the building, while moving from one part of the building to another, or while waiting in communal areas such as reception points, witness rooms or outside a court or hearing room. This requirement is in addition to observing all other risk mitigation measures in place.

Following ongoing engagement with the Public Health Agency, and as part of the January 2021 review of our [Covid-19 Risk Assessments](#), NICTS will now be applying more stringent guidance, as follows:

You **MUST wear a face covering when in a public space in an NICTS venue**

You **MUST wear a face covering when in a Courtroom**

You **MAY choose to wear a face covering when working in an office area**

Benefits of Face Coverings

Following the identification in the UK and Ireland of a new variant of the Covid-19 virus, which has shown evidence of increased transmissibility, NICTS has engaged with the Public Health Agency, who have recommended increased use of face coverings. The latest scientific guidance states that face coverings and face masks control the source of the virus and provide important mitigation against all routes of transmission.

The emergence of the new variant of this virus will require us all to redouble our efforts to reduce all forms of transmission. At all NICTS venues, we will continue to:

- Limit the number of people physically required to attend
- Facilitate social distancing
- Use an enhanced cleaning regime
- Promote good hand hygiene
- Increase ventilation where possible
- **Mandate Face Coverings**

We recognise that this approach is the most effective method of protecting our staff, other court users, and members of the public.

Face Coverings in Public Spaces

You **MUST** wear a face covering when in a public space in an NICTS venue

The use of face coverings in our public areas is a legal requirement, which applies equally to members of the public, NICTS staff and all other court users.

Where you are exempt under government guidance from wearing a face covering in specified locations (such as shops or on public transport), you will also be exempt from wearing a face covering in NICTS public spaces and courtrooms.

A small number of disposable face coverings will be available at our security screening areas, however we ask that you bring a face covering with you, for use whilst in the building.

Signage will be displayed regarding the use of face coverings, but if you are in any doubt about whether you are required to wear a face covering, you are advised to use one.

A face visor or shield may be worn in addition to a face covering but not instead of one. This is because face visors or shields do not adequately cover the nose and mouth.

Face Coverings in Courtrooms

You **MUST** wear a face covering when in a Courtroom

From 12 January 2021, face coverings must be worn by everyone in an NICTS Courtroom or Hearing Room. This requirement applies even when seated, and even when other mitigating measures (such as screens, or 2m social distancing) are in place.

The exception to this is when those involved in the proceedings, such as witness or counsel, are required to speak. Participants in proceedings may continue to wear face coverings when speaking if they wish to, but may be required by the Judge to remove them if there are issues of audibility or visibility.

The requirement to wear face coverings also applies to the accused on trial, subject to certain considerations around identification. It may be considered that a requirement for an accused to remove his/her face covering purely for the means of identification is potentially prejudicial. The Judge and/or court clerk will ascertain from prosecution and defence if identification is necessary. If so, the accused can be asked to remove a face covering before the relevant witness enters the court room. Once identification has been dealt with, the accused can be instructed to put their face covering back on.

A face visor or shield may be worn in addition to a face covering but not instead of one. This is because face visors or shields do not adequately cover the nose and mouth.

Face Coverings in Office Areas

You **MAY** choose to wear a face covering when working in an office area

NICTS has completed a significant amount of work to make our office areas Covid Secure, and have followed all Public Health Agency and [Government guidance](#) to ensure that our workplaces are safe.

While there is an increased risk of transmission from the new variant of COVID-19 within the community, the advice remains that the existing risk mitigation measures are sufficient, provided that we all continue to comply with this guidance.

Our [Covid-19 Risk Assessments](#) remain valid, but will be formally reviewed during January 2021 to take account of the revised guidance around face coverings

NICTS recognise that staff may feel additional reassurance by wearing face coverings in office areas, and will continue to facilitate this. A very limited supply of disposable face coverings is available for staff, however we ask that you bring a face covering with you if you choose to wear one.

