



Cabinet Office

Room 401  
70 Whitehall  
London, SW1A 2AS

foi-team@cabinetoffice.gov.uk  
[www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

Colin Davies

By email: [request-703307-6a969a6f@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-703307-6a969a6f@whatdotheyknow.com)

FOI Reference: FOI2020/16830

24 November 2020

Dear Colin Davies

We refer to your request where you asked:

*“1. Details of any risk assessments undertaken on face mask usage outside of a sterile environment?”*

*2. Details of evidence supporting the use of facemasks?*

*3. Number of shop workers contracting Covid 19 prior to mandatory face mask usage?*

*4. Number of shop workers contracting Covid 19 since mandating face masks?”*

I am writing to advise you that following a search of our paper and electronic records, I have established that some of the information you requested is held by the Cabinet Office.

Some of the information you have requested is exempt under section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 exempts information if this information is reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption and the Cabinet Office is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information.

Regarding your question for details of any risk assessments undertaken on face mask usage, the evidence in relation to face masks SAGE have stated:

“14. On balance, there is evidence to recommend the use of cloth masks in certain higher-risk settings as a precautionary measure where masks could be at least partially effective. 15. The common denominator is that these settings are enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible consistently, creating a risk of close social contact with multiple parties the person does not usually meet.”

The above can be found on page 3 in [SAGE 27 minutes: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) response, 21 April 2020](#).

Further information can be found on [DELVE: Report on face masks for the general public, 21 April 2020](#).

Social distancing, hand hygiene and surface cleansing remain the principal recommended mitigations. This has not changed. The introduction of face coverings is supplementary to, not alternative to, the other mitigations and is required and/or advised when these other measures cannot be maintained.

The settings in which face coverings have been introduced as mandatory are those in which the other mitigations cannot be guaranteed by operators as they involve customers or service users entering public indoor settings where people will encounter people they do not normally meet (e.g. public transport, shops, supermarkets, banks, etc). This list has been increased in line with new services and sectors which are opening up with reduced lockdown measures.

In addition to the above, there is a range of [Government guidance](#) that you may find helpful.

On your question regarding evidence supporting the use of facemasks, the policy of wearing face coverings in public spaces was developed over a number of weeks across a range of departments and was based on a range of external and internal academic and expert analysis on the relative benefits of face coverings in reducing transmission. In regard to the health conditions and risks, the policy was reviewed in line with Public Sector Equality Duty (which includes disabilities and psychological effects) risk assessment requirements and any additional risks were discussed with relevant stakeholders. Risks were identified for those with disabilities and respiratory health conditions which resulted in the regulation laying out a range of reasonable exemptions for those who suffer from these sorts of conditions. You can find the details of these

exemptions in the relevant legislation below which have a section on 'reasonable excuses' and more information on reasonable exemptions can be found on the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) guidance.

- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings on Public Transport\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)

Cabinet Office does not hold any information on your questions:

*“3. Number of shop workers contracting Covid 19 prior to mandatory face mask usage?”*

*4. Number of shop workers contracting Covid 19 since mandating face masks?”*

The Department of Health and Social Care may hold this information and you may wish to contact the department on [this link](#).

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request or wish to request an internal review, you should write to:

Eirian Walsh Atkins  
Cabinet Office  
70 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AS

email: [foi-team@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:foi-team@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

You should note that the Cabinet Office will not normally accept an application for internal review if it is received more than two months after the date that the reply was issued.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the Cabinet Office. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House

Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'J. A. Smith', written in a cursive style.

FOI Team  
Cabinet Office