



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

CABINET STATEMENT

Written Statement: use of medical masks in health and social care

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Today, I publish advice I have received from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales following new guidance on the use of masks from the World Health Organisation (WHO) published on 5th June 2020. I am grateful for this advice and accept the recommendations made.

I have already announced that, as a result of this new guidance, Welsh Government now recommends the wearing of face coverings by the public in situations in which social distancing cannot be maintained. Our advice for those making such coverings has been updated accordingly.

I turn now to the use of medical masks in health and social care. The Chief Medical Officer has confirmed that, as previously, medical grade masks should be reserved

for use during the direct care of patients or residents, following the Infection Prevention and Control guidance agreed across the UK and published by Public Health Wales.

The Chief Medical Officer is clear also there is insufficient evidence to support the wearing of medical masks by workers in non-clinical settings. It remains of paramount importance that health and social care staff observe social distancing in all situations, while adhering to good hand and respiratory hygiene practices. In Wales, health and social care organisations are under a legal duty to ensure that social distancing is possible. Clearly, should there be exceptional circumstances in which social distancing is impossible, then staff must be able to wear a medical mask should they wish to.

I also accept that medical masks have a place for the protection of the vulnerable in higher risk settings and have agreed that shielded people in Wales should wear a medical mask, should they have to enter any health or social care facility, although this need should be minimised where possible. When other members of the public need to enter such facilities, they can of course wear a face covering if they wish to.

While medical masks are an essential part of personal protective equipment during direct care, their wider use can have adverse consequences if they are thought to replace the need for social distancing or if they are not used and disposed of appropriately or cause the wearer to touch the face more often. As a result, there is little evidence that the more widespread wearing of medical masks benefits either staff or the public.