

**FROM: ROBIN SWANN MLA
MINISTER FOR HEALTH**

DATE: 6 AUGUST 2020

TO: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

FINAL EXECUTIVE PAPER: WEARING OF FACE COVERINGS

Introduction

1. I wrote to colleagues last week (attached for ease of reference), setting out some concerns on my part as regards the current Executive position on the use of face coverings. In summary, my view is that the approach taken in our meeting on 23 July, while designed to accommodate some different viewpoints on this issue, rather than representing a workable compromise has actually been counterproductive, and has caused confusion in the minds of the public.

2. In view of this, I set out my view that the Executive should:
 - a) issue a joint public statement urging people to wear face coverings in shops to protect themselves and others. The public should also be advised that the Executive has now taken the powers and they should expect this policy to be enforced through regulation in the coming days;

 - b) make clear that enforcement is the clear intention of Ministers; and

 - c) bring forward from the review date to decide on enforcement from August 20 to August 13, with a projected start date for enforcement of August 14.

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3. I have received responses to my note from the Ministers for Education, Infrastructure, Communities, Finance and Justice. The Education Minister supported my position on the issuing of a statement, and noted my views on enforcement. All other Ministers who replied were supportive of my position, with the Justice Minister going further and suggesting that the review be brought forward to 6 August.
4. I remain strongly of the views set out in my note, and indeed the evolving position further underpins my concerns. Recent data has underlined the continuing threat from Covid-19 with virus transmission in NI increasing markedly since the beginning of July. Experience in different parts of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland have also emphasised the ongoing risk of infections spiking.
5. In view of this, and the wider support indicated by those colleagues who have responded, I am now tabling this issue for formal decision by the Executive.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that the Executive:
 - d) Issues an unequivocal and immediate public statement urging the public to wear face coverings in shops and other designated enclosed spaces. The public should further be advised that this is now a mandatory requirement and to expect this to be enforced through law in the coming days.
 - e) Agrees to bring its planned review of the enforcement issue forward from August 20 to August 13, with a projected start date for enforcement of August 14.

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