

Message

From: TEO HOCS (JB) [/o=NIGOV/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4499397f4a9343b48fc8e2473f02f55e-TEO HOCS (JB) teo-]
Sent: 31/12/2021 09:37:27
To: Stewart, Chris (TEO) [chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk]; Pearson, Karen [karen.pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk]; Brady, Jayne [jayne.brady@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk]; Luney, Peter [peter.luney@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk]; Holmes, Jane [jane.holmes@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk]
CC: **Name Redacted** [redacted@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk]
Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Thanks Chris, subject to advisers input, what mechanism and when are we suggesting to get executive decision?

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Date: Friday, 31 Dec 2021, 9:21 am
To: TEO HOCS (JB) <HOCS@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>, Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>, Brady, Jayne <Jayne.Brady@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>, Luney, Peter <Peter.Luney@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>, Holmes, Jane <Jane.Holmes@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: **Name Redacted** [redacted@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk]
Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Jayne

No changes are required to the legislation. The grace period is an administrative arrangement, so it can be altered at will by the Executive. However, a formal Executive decision to do so would be required. The extant decision to enforce from 7/1/22 is binding on all Ministers and their Departments and agents, until changed.

C

From: TEO HOCS (JB)
Sent: 31 December 2021 09:17
To: Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Brady, Jayne <Jayne.Brady@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Luney, Peter <Peter.Luney@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Holmes, Jane <Jane.Holmes@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Thanks Karen, happy to. Can you advise whether the proposed approach requires any changes to regulations or will it be specified only in guidance? Ie have we advised GP letter in regs?

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Date: Friday, 31 Dec 2021, 8:35 am

To: Brady, Jayne <Jayne.Brady@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>, Luney, Peter <Peter.Luney@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>, Holmes, Jane <Jane.Holmes@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>, Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Subject: FW: Face covering exemption

Morning Jayne

Would you be happy to alert advisers to the face coverings situation and the need for a delay. Chris has offered a potential line below

Thanks

Karen

From: Pearson, Karen

Sent: 31 December 2021 08:31

To: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Luney, Peter <Peter.Luney@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Holmes, Jane <Jane.Holmes@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Cc: Name Redacted <Name Redacted@health-ni.gov.uk>; McNabb, Chris <Chris.McNabb@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk> NR
Name Redacted <Name Redacted@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Name Redacted <Name Redacted@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk> NR
Name Redacted <Name Redacted@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Morning

The line is realistic in the circumstances.

There are some issues which can't wait until Thursday's Executive (and we will need to discuss and agree on Tuesday how to raise this – there were concerns raised yesterday so I don't think this will come as a surprise).

- Translink are planning to invest in extra security and are on target for 7th. I've given DFI an informal indication that we may not be ready for 7th but we need to give a clearer indication to prevent them refusing access to services on 7th. I don't think this can wait until Thursday to stand them down. Translink are already asking for more clarity especially on the form of the exemption
- Standardising the letter seems the best way forward. There is no need for GPs to describe why an individual is exempt
- We need clarity on whether a fee will be levied (hopefully not)
- Individuals are already asking GPs for letters and there are a lot of treat officials in the system
- Having a good rationale for the delay as 7th is already in the public domain via the WMS

I'm happy to ask Jayne to raise with advisers today but we will need to move on the above asap, and with Translink in particular by Tuesday latest.

Karen

From: Stewart, Chris (TEO)

Sent: 30 December 2021 17:10

To: Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Luney, Peter <Peter.Luney@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Holmes, Jane <Jane.Holmes@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Cc: NR <NR@health-ni.gov.uk>; McNabb, Chris <Chris.McNabb@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk> NR
NR <NR@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; NR <NR@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk> NR
NR <NR@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Subject: FW: Face covering exemption

Karen and colleagues

To see. Not unreasonable from DoH colleagues, and this needs to be nursed along. I think it might be prudent not to press them to do a paper as well.

Meanwhile, I think we need to damp down expectations of early enforcement. Should we ask Jayne to test a line to take with advisors, along the lines of the following?

"The law now requires you to wear a mask in a public place unless you are exempt, and can provide supporting evidence of why you are exempt. You won't be asked to produce that evidence just yet, but a requirement to do so when asked will be introduced in the coming weeks.

Details of how to obtain the evidence you need will be provided before the change takes effect."

C

From: Stewart, Chris (TEO)
Sent: 30 December 2021 16:57
To: Wilkinson, Jim <jim.wilkinson@health-ni.gov.uk>; Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: Name Redacted <Name Redacted@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Name Redacted <Name Redacted@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Jim

Thank you, that will do well.

C

From: Wilkinson, Jim
Sent: 30 December 2021 16:54
To: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: Name Redacted <Name Redacted@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Chris

Appreciate the urgency, and I think we can work to preliminary advice for next Thursday, just conscious that even with informal discussions with Allen, the formal process for getting GPs to provide a service is through the Board, usually with associated PHA advice, conscious we could start a hare running now with Alan, for the sake of a few days, when we might have greater clarity and advice on the approach from better informed Colleagues, which may well be as you have suggested, an on request pro forma as stage 1.

Jim

From: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Sent: 30 December 2021 16:38
To: Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>; Wilkinson, Jim <jim.wilkinson@health-ni.gov.uk>

Cc: **Name Redacted** <[\[redacted\]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:[redacted]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>

Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Gearoid

Thank you – I quite understand the limits on what we can expect Board and PHA colleagues to do in the midst of a pandemic and a holiday!

Would there be any chance of a further conversation with Alan tomorrow that I might join? I suspect that Ministers and TEO policy colleagues would be keen to explore a possible option of starting with a simple pro-forma letter on request from GPs (recognising all the points that Alan made) and moving to a central system as/when available.

The Executive is likely to meet next Thursday, and we will need to be in a position to give at least some preliminary advice on what is feasible.

C

From: Cassidy, Gearoid

Sent: 30 December 2021 15:56

To: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Wilkinson, Jim <jim.wilkinson@health-ni.gov.uk>

Cc: **Name Redacted** <[\[redacted\]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:[redacted]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>

Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Chris

Realistically will be next week before we will be able to link in with relevant HSCB/ PHA colleagues on this. Will pick up early next week when we should be in a better place to advise.

Gearóid

Tel: **Irrelevant & Sensitive**

gearoid.cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk

From: Stewart, Chris (TEO)

Sent: 30 December 2021 13:41

To: Wilkinson, Jim <jim.wilkinson@health-ni.gov.uk>; Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>

Cc: **Name Redacted** <[\[redacted\]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:[redacted]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>

Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Gearoid, Jim

Thank you, this is helpful, and none of it is unexpected.

How soon might we form a view on whether the GP route (which would be just as Alan described) or the central system would be the more feasible?

We can signal the need for an extension of the grace period, but would need to give Ministers an early indication of how long would be needed.

C

From: Wilkinson, Jim

Sent: 30 December 2021 13:37

To: Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>; Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Gearoid,

All very rational issues that would need to be addressed, I think we need PHA/ HSCB advice on the best and most simple pathway for the public and least burdensome on Health Service, it would also be good to catch up with Naresh on any initial considerations that might have taken place on implementation. I think either way we will need longer than 7th to develop a process.

Jim

From: Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>

Sent: 30 December 2021 13:31

To: Wilkinson, Jim <jim.wilkinson@health-ni.gov.uk>; Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Jim, Chris

For info – had an initial discussion with Alan Stout re: the role of GPs in face mask exemptions. He understands this is very much work in progress and won't be communicating more widely at this stage.

To summarise his views:

- GPs have to date resisted approached from public re face mask exemptions; and have been rigidly enforcing the wearing of masks in practice. he would anticipate significant push back from general practice on this.
- Need for evidence for mask-exemption would inevitably increase patient contacts from public – placing further pressure on services and making it more difficult for patients to contact practices.
- In his estimation, the true number of genuine medical exemptions would be very low- however a significantly larger proportion of people who are not exempt will still seek a cert; and a potentially significant proportion of those may be quite challenging to deal with
- Would be helpful to have clear criteria for determining who will be exempt, and contacting them proactively re: their exemption. However, he feels it's unlikely all qualifying people will be successfully identified, and in any case there will be significant grey areas which will require a medical professional to make a determination.
- Highlighted the need to deal with retroactive applications for exemption certs (ie after someone has been fined)

We discussed whether a central system could be set up for applying for exemption – similar to the vaccine exemption system. Would have the advantage of providing a dedicated service without need for contacting GPs directly. Details of the vaccine system are available on NI Direct <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/apply-covid-exemption-certificate> - could be a useful model for this service.

As discussed, will need to explore with PHA/ HSCB colleagues.

G

Gearoid

Tel: Irrelevant & Sensitive
gearoid.cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk

From: Wilkinson, Jim

Sent: 30 December 2021 11:37

To: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>; McBride, Michael <Michael.McBride@health-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: Geoghegan, Lourda <Lourda.Geoghegan@health-ni.gov.uk>; Chada, Naresh <Naresh.Chada@health-ni.gov.uk>;
[Name Redacted] <[\[Name Redacted\]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:[Name Redacted]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)> [Name Redacted] <[\[Name Redacted\]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:[Name Redacted]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>
Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Chris,

Not aware specifically in relation to the issue of letters re: face coverings, but GPs can and do charge for letters for certain Driving Licence applications, Passports, etc.

I think this points to the need to get some clarity to the system ASAP on the processes to support the new legislative requirements, and as discussed allowing the exemption period to extend until we can be clearer would be helpful.

As Michael has previously noted, we are not fully sighted on any discussions that might have already taken place.

Jim

From: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Sent: 30 December 2021 11:30
To: Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>; Wilkinson, Jim <jim.wilkinson@health-ni.gov.uk>; McBride, Michael <Michael.McBride@health-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: Geoghegan, Lourda <Lourda.Geoghegan@health-ni.gov.uk>; Chada, Naresh <Naresh.Chada@health-ni.gov.uk>;
[Name Redacted] <[\[Name Redacted\]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:[Name Redacted]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)> [Name Redacted] <[\[Name Redacted\]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:[Name Redacted]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>
Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Colleagues

I'm at the Executive meeting, where Ministers are reporting anecdotes of GPs charging for letters or refusing to provide them.

Do GPs charge?

C

From: Cassidy, Gearoid
Sent: 30 December 2021 10:19
To: Wilkinson, Jim <jim.wilkinson@health-ni.gov.uk>; Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; McBride, Michael <Michael.McBride@health-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: Geoghegan, Lourda <Lourda.Geoghegan@health-ni.gov.uk>; Chada, Naresh <Naresh.Chada@health-ni.gov.uk>;
[Name Redacted] <[\[Name Redacted\]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:[Name Redacted]@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>
Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Chris, Jim

I am about too and happy to discuss.

I haven't been party to any discussions re: this and would anticipate it would present significant challenges, if enacted. As Jim says, we have been seeking to reduce the burden on practices at this time to focus on vaccination programme and meeting the rising demand on services.

Am due to have a call with Alan Stout later this morning; so would be useful if we could have our chat before . does 11ish suit? I can send zoom.

Gearóid

Tel: **Irrelevant & Sensitive**

gearoid.cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk

From: Wilkinson, Jim

Sent: 30 December 2021 09:55

To: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; McBride, Michael <Michael.McBride@health-ni.gov.uk>

Cc: Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>; Geoghegan, Lourda <Lourda.Geoghegan@health-ni.gov.uk>; Chada, Naresh <Naresh.Chada@health-ni.gov.uk>; **Name Redacted** <@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Chris,

I am about today, happy to have some preliminary discussions, but certainly think we would benefit from HSCB and PHA colleagues as we progress, not sure on their availability today.

Jim

From: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Sent: 30 December 2021 09:52

To: McBride, Michael <Michael.McBride@health-ni.gov.uk>

Cc: Wilkinson, Jim <jim.wilkinson@health-ni.gov.uk>; Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>; Geoghegan, Lourda <Lourda.Geoghegan@health-ni.gov.uk>; Chada, Naresh <Naresh.Chada@health-ni.gov.uk>; **Name Redacted** <@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Michael

Thank you.

Jim, Gearoid – if either of you is available, could we have a word later today? It would be helpful to consider how best to engage with GPs, the form that any evidence of exemption might take, and the means of accessing it – taking account of the points made in Jim's email.

C

From: McBride, Michael

Sent: 30 December 2021 09:42

To: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>

Cc: Wilkinson, Jim <jim.wilkinson@health-ni.gov.uk>; Cassidy, Gearoid <Gearoid.Cassidy@health-ni.gov.uk>; Geoghegan, Lourda <Lourda.Geoghegan@health-ni.gov.uk>; Chada, Naresh <Naresh.Chada@health-ni.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: Face covering exemption

Chris

I wasn't involved in any discussions or considerations on this at all and have concerns in respect of potential workload and how might be received. I indicated this to Liz prior to her leave.

Indeed I was surprised to see this emerge although perhaps there have been discussions I've not been partly to.

Relevant primary policy colleagues sit with Jim Wilkinson's team and Gearoid Cassidy. I suspect any approach will need to be via HSCB with input from PHA in terms of a pathway for any exemptions.

Michael

Sent with BlackBerry Work
(www.blackberry.com)

From: Stewart, Chris (TEO) <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Date: Thursday, 30 Dec 2021, 9:36 am
To: McBride, Michael <Michael.McBride@health-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: **Name Redacted** <h@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Subject: Face covering exemption

Michael

Trust you had some sort of break over Christmas.

TEO colleagues have asked about engagement with GPs about the requirement on those claiming exemption from the duty to wear a face covering to provide proof of exemption (which they will presumably seek from GPs).

Who would be best to speak to in DoH?

C