

Policy and Guidelines: Use of face coverings during the Covid-19 pandemic

Wearing of face coverings

A face covering is a material you wear that covers your nose and mouth. Wearing one helps stop the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus), especially from people who don't know they have the virus. They are made from cloth materials such as cotton or silk, and should have at least two layers of fabric.

Visors are not the best option for protecting yourself and others from COVID-19. Using a visor is better than not wearing any face covering, but visors should only be worn by those who have an illness or impairment that makes wearing a face covering difficult.

HSE advice on use of face coverings is available at <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-coverings-masks-and-covid-19/when-to-wear.html>

The wearing of a face covering is required by law on public transport and in all settings where multiple people may be present such as:

- shops, including pharmacies
- shopping centres
- libraries
- cinemas
- museums
- hair salons and barbers
- laundries and dry cleaners
- in busy outdoor spaces where people may gather.

All members of the University Community should wear a face covering in all indoor settings across the University, except when in sole occupancy offices. The wearing of face coverings by students will be mandatory in all classroom and other teaching settings.

There may be good reasons, including personal health reasons, why a small minority of students and employees are unable to wear a face covering. The policy of wearing face coverings will apply unless an individual student has an illness or impairment that would make wearing a face covering difficult. In such circumstances the student should contact the Covid Response Team prior to their arrival on campus, on 01 474 7999 or covid.response@mu.ie, who will advise the student and their department(s) on the steps required to mitigate risk for the student and others.

Face coverings are not recommended for anyone who:

- has trouble breathing
- is unconscious or incapacitated
- is unable to remove it without help
- has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing them
- needs to communicate with someone who has learning difficulties, is hard of hearing or deaf.

In these cases, if the person can wear a visor, it will give them some protection. But these are the only times when someone should wear a visor. Cloth face coverings are a better way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

The situation in classrooms and other teaching settings will usually be as follows.

1. Student seating will be set up with approximately 1.1m (centre to centre) spacing between students. No seating is at less than 1m separation.
2. Approximately 10% of seating will be set up with 2m separation, and these should be used by students who are unable to wear a face covering, or who otherwise are in a higher risk health category, and must take particular care. In such circumstances a visor or face shield should be worn.
3. Lecturers and tutors will not generally be expected or required to wear face coverings while at the teaching station (which are all positioned at more than 2m from students) and should at all times maintain 2m separation from students in classrooms. Lecturers are encouraged to consider wearing a face shield while at the teaching station. If, for some reason, an interaction at a separation of less than 2m is needed, the lecturer or tutor should wear a face covering for that interaction. If anyone encroaches on the 2m spacing without a face covering it is appropriate to ask them to step back and respect 2m distancing.
4. In situations where demonstrators or tutors must move around in a classroom or laboratory, a face covering must be worn.
5. Where a lecturer or tutor cannot wear a face covering they should contact the Covid Response Team prior to their arrival on campus, on 01 474 7999 or covid.response@mu.ie, who will advise on the steps required to mitigate their risk.

A washable cloth face mask will be made available at the point of returning to campus for every member of staff who requests it. It is strongly emphasized, however, that use of a facemask does not at all diminish the essential need for physical distancing and good hygiene practices.