

## Cookies on GOV.UK

We use some essential cookies to make this website work.

We'd like to set additional cookies to understand how you use GOV.UK, remember your settings and improve government services.

We also use cookies set by other sites to help us deliver content from their services.

Accept additional cookies

Reject additional cookies

[View cookies \(/help/cookies\)](/help/cookies)



Menu

### Coronavirus (COVID-19) (/coronavirus)

Guidance and support

1. [Home \(https://www.gov.uk/\)](https://www.gov.uk/)
  2. [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) \(https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon\)](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon)
  3. [Driving and transport in the UK during coronavirus \(https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/driving-and-transport-in-the-uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/driving-and-transport-in-the-uk)
  4. [Free face coverings to transport operators scheme \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-face-coverings-to-transport-operators-scheme\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-face-coverings-to-transport-operators-scheme)
- [Department of Health & Social Care \(https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care)

Policy paper

# Free face coverings to transport operators scheme

Published 28 October 2021

## Contents

[Legal basis](#)

[Objective](#)

[Beneficiaries](#)

[Budget](#)

[Functioning](#)

[Conditions of use](#)



© Crown copyright 2021

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3) or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-face-coverings-to-transport-operators-scheme/free-face-coverings-to-transport-operators-scheme>

## Legal basis

The primary legislation used to invoke this scheme were Section 2 and Section 2A of the [National Health Service Act 2006](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/41/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/41/contents>).

## Objective

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has a central and ongoing role in protecting public health. DHSC currently holds a stock of personal protective equipment (PPE) including the Type II and Type IIR face masks, which can be used as a face covering for source control.

To protect public health and support passenger compliance with the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/791/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/791/contents/made>), in April 2021 the department committed to providing a supply of face masks to transport operators for use as face coverings, free of charge. This coincided with the lifting of restrictions outlined in the [COVID-10 Response – Spring 2021 roadmap](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021>), and thereby helping reduce the spread of the virus.

The initial phase of the scheme ran from 21 April 2021 to 16 August 2021 and concerned the distribution of surgical-style masks to transport operators in both the public and private sectors, to be used as a contingency supply of face coverings by passengers.

On 19 July 2021, at [step 4 of the roadmap](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary#step-4---not-before-21-june) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary#step-4---not-before-21-june>), the government removed the majority of outstanding legal restrictions, including the legal requirement to wear face coverings. However, given the continued threat from COVID-19, the government continues to expect and recommend that face coverings be worn in crowded, enclosed or poorly ventilated areas such as public transport. Some transport operators and mayoral combined authorities have also mandated the wearing of face coverings on public transport.

To support the continued usage of face coverings in line with [government guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>), and to support the reopening of the economy and increased use of the transport network, the government extended the provision of face masks to transport operators for use as face coverings; initially until the end of September 2021 and subsequently until the end of December 2021. From the first extension of the scheme in August 2021, the offer included the provision of Type II face masks for use by transport workers as well as passengers.

Due to their prolonged and widespread use, most people have access to face coverings. However, to continue to support high rates of face covering use on public transport, a contingency supply is available for transport settings to offer to people who, among other things:

- have forgotten their face covering
- are unable to use their face covering as it has become damp, soiled or unsafe
- are struggling to access a face covering

Additionally, since 17 August 2021, transport operators are now also able to order face coverings for transport workers in instances where they do not have sufficient stocks to provide to their workforce.

## Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of the face coverings scheme are all transport operators in England. This includes:

- taxis and privately hired vehicles (PHVs)
- buses
- coaches
- community transport
- train operating companies
- light rail
- motorway service areas
- ferries

## Budget

The value of the free face coverings scheme for the period 21 April 2021 to 31 December 2021 is around £11,472,000.

## Functioning

The aid takes the form of free distribution of surgical-style face masks to transport operators as a contingency supply of face coverings for use by passengers and transport workers; in the first instance, to proactively aid compliance with the government's mandatory face coverings regulations and, subsequently, after 19 July 2021, to facilitate compliance with government guidance.

In some settings and scenarios, when used appropriately, surgical masks can be classed as PPE. However, in the context of transport settings, these masks are classed as face coverings. A face covering is something that safely covers the nose and mouth. [Clinical advice received from the UK Health Security Agency \(formerly Public Health England\) says that surgical masks may be used as face coverings \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-and-covid-19-statement-from-an-expert-panel\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-and-covid-19-statement-from-an-expert-panel) as they act as a barrier around the nose and mouth, reducing droplet and aerosol emissions.

Although the offer of face coverings at zero cost will be made by DHSC, the Department for Transport (DfT) facilitates this process by informing all transport operators of the offer through their existing stakeholder channels, thus ensuring the provision is not specific or selective.

Transport operators can order face coverings from the DHSC to meet expected need until 31 December 2021.

For further information about safer transport guidance for operators, see [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safer transport guidance for operators \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators).

## Conditions of use

The face coverings are to be distributed to passengers free of charge. Transport operators are not to request more supplies of face coverings than they require to provide to passengers on a contingency basis.

The face coverings are to be supplied to passengers on a contingency basis. The supply does not substitute government guidance that people using public transport are expected to supply their own face covering. This is a contingency supply to be used in such situations as set out above.

The face coverings can also be distributed to workers. Transport operators are not to request more supplies of face coverings than are needed for their workforce and should only make a request in instances where they do not have sufficient stock.

The face coverings supplied are disposable face masks; they are not to be distributed nor used as PPE or for medical purposes. For distribution to transport passengers or workers, the masks are classed as face coverings only. [A face covering, as set out in the guidance, is any type of covering which covers the nose and mouth. \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own#what-a-face-covering-is\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own#what-a-face-covering-is)

All transport bodies should distribute the face coverings in an appropriate manner and make adequate provision for the disposal of used face coverings.

Where the above conditions are not adhered to, DHSC may, without notice, terminate their supply of face coverings with immediate effect.

---

## **OGL**

All content is available under the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated

© Crown copyright