

A Summary Guide to Face Covering Options

Introduction

Since the middle of July 2021, the mandatory requirement for face covering has been relaxed in some parts of the UK. However, because of the uncertainty of the efficacy of the available vaccinations for CLL Patients we will probably choose to continue to wear face coverings when out and about in a public space.






Our potential risk of infection to Covid is determined by several factors: our level of immunity, the amount of contact we have with the public, and our own personal antiviral hygiene measures. We should all conduct a simple risk assessment to establish what each of us needs to do to maximize our protection levels. Adequate face coverings can enhance our level of protection and the following is a brief guide to help with this.

Regulations and certification; European Standard EN 149 sets out the testing requirements for filtering half masks (a half mask covers the nose and mouth and is usually anchored under the chin). There are three levels specified with corresponding filtration and leakage criteria:

- FFP1 80% filtration; Internal leak rate: maximum 22%
- FFP2 94% filtration; Internal leak rate: maximum 8% (Similar to the US standard N95)
- FFP3 99% filtration); Internal leak rate: maximum 2% (Similar to the US standard N99)

Where a product does not conform to EN 149 standards, manufacturers can make claims regarding properties such as: antimicrobial, antiviral and antibacterial. These can be confusing. Overlapping terms and the standards that may apply are voluntary and in some cases it may be a case of marketing over substance – buyer beware! In some cases, these claims will be backed up by referencing Testing Laboratories or providing Certificates of Conformity, again, you would be advised not to take these claims at face value.

- Note: Beards, glasses and face shape can significantly affect the amount of leakage from a mask and its ability to seal around the mouth and nose.
- Practical Considerations in the following table include ease of breathing and how easy each mask is to put on and take off.
- Increased protection levels offered by each face covering are usually accompanied by a trade off in breathing resistance. It is not practical to recommend a powered respirator as an everyday solution, but it may be an option to a select few in specific circumstances.
- An exhalation valve fitted to a FFP2 or FFP3 mask can make it easier to breathe, but this type is not allowed in most health care settings as the valve allows breath to be exhaled and could infect others.
- Visors offer little or no protection from airborne virus transmission and as such are not included in the following table.

Type	Description	Image	Practical Considerations	Comment
Fabric masks	Homemade or commercially available. Single or multi-layer. May have removable / replaceable elements.		Usually held in place by two ear loops. Fairly comfortable to wear but potential for leakage each side of nose. Multi use if washed regularly. Relatively cheap.	Generally low level of protection provided but this can be enhanced if multiple layers are used within mask. Extra protection claimed to be offered by "Evac", Copper Clothing and "Silver Ion" models
Snoods	Tubular garment usually worn around neck and pulled up to cover face and nose.		Comfortable to wear and quick to deploy. Protection can be enhanced if double folded. Can be very warm in hot conditions.	Common trade name; Buff. Generally low level of protection provided but some makes claim to have antiviral coatings; "Virustatic"
Surgical masks	Light woven polypropylene and fabric materials. Adjustable to fit under chin.		Inexpensive and widely available. Potential leak paths around nose and cheeks. Disposable. Minimum level of effectiveness even if worn correctly.	Minimum standard required in health care settings. Not environmentally friendly. Temptation to re-use is high.
FFP2 masks	May come with ear loops or around the head fastenings. May have metal or plastic moldable nose bridge fitting.		Increased level of protection depending on fit. Increased breathing effort.	Available with front mounted exhalation valve (see above)
FFP3 masks	Generally supplied with around the head fastening. Colour of fastening usually differentiates it as FFP3		Usually, the best fitting mask if worn correctly. Multi use. Model shown has side exhalation valve fitted. Higher price point.	Highest protection offered but breathing resistance is high and may be uncomfortable for some especially when increased physical effort required to perform tasks.