

**BATOD update in relation to face coverings in education settings**

The UK governments have recently issued guidance around face coverings in education settings. Different rules exist in different parts of the UK about which you can find out more on the relevant regional websites:

* [England](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)
* [Northern Ireland](https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public#face-coverings)
* [Scotland](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/pages/face-coverings/)
* [Wales](https://gov.wales/face-coverings-frequently-asked-questions)

This BATOD document outlines the following:

* Steps BATOD is taking to support its members and deaf children and young people (DCYP) and their families
* The vital role of QToDs for DCYP in education settings
* Social distancing and face coverings and their potential impact on learning and social and emotional wellbeing on DCYP

**How BATOD is supporting its members, DCYP and their families**

BATOD is currently in discussion with the teaching unions across the UK on a number of items including the vital role of the QToD, the impact of Covid 19 on DCYP and their families, accessibility with regards to online learning platforms, the use of face coverings in schools and social distancing measures. Now more than ever, the expertise offered by QToDs is essential in all education settings where DCYP are educated.

BATOD and the NDCS are in liaison with NHS England about the urgent need for clear panel surgical masks which meet the standards required for their use in clinical settings. This process is on-going and BATOD will keep you advised of any developments.

In August 2020 BATOD worked with the NDCS and NatSIP to produce joint guidance about the return to school/college for DCYP. These documents contain detailed information and guidance related to areas of impact during the Covid era. Links to the documents can be found [here](https://www.batod.org.uk/meeting-the-needs-of-deaf-children-as-schools-reopen-new-guidance/%29).

In May BATOD and the Assistive Listening Technology Working Group provided [specific guidance on equipment in use with deaf children](https://www.batod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Cleaning-hearing-devices-and-radio-aids-supporting-health-and-safety-during-Covid-19-v4.pdf).

Also in May, BATOD surveyed its members. A summary of the survey can be found [here](https://www.batod.org.uk/resource/batod-survey-summary-members-views-on-how-covid-19-and-the-lockdown-had-been-affecting-education-and-childrens-services/). This survey provided details from our members which were used to inform BATOD’s response to the Education Select Committee in July.

Since the start of lockdown BATOD has also been providing and sharing resources for virtual teaching and learning on the BATOD website. Please do keep sharing your resources as they are greatly appreciated by peers.

**How DCYP are being impacted by infection control measures in schools**

As QToDs we are well aware of the adverse impact of using a face covering for the deaf population and now more than ever specialist advice and input from QToDs are essential to ensure staff in education settings are aware of the challenges such as:

* the lack of visual cues, including lipreading and also facial expressions to support understanding
* accessing facial expressions, lip patterns and hand placement on the face to support those using BSL
* accessing speech for those using listening technology
* the compounding impact of background noise alongside compromised access to sound and lip patterns
* the inability to see the whole face to attach meaning and support understanding
* young children may be worried or put off from communicating with people who are wearing face coverings.

NB: References which provide evidence of this can be found at the end of this document.

In addition, there is potential disadvantage associated with social distancing measures which again can impede access to speech sounds and can also make lipreading harder. It is recommended that radio aids/ALD are used in such situations as well as all the usual deaf awareness strategies that are so vital and consistently shared by QToDs.

The guidance around face coverings in schools exists to support keeping everyone safe, limit the spread of the virus and enable access to face to face teaching. There are of course people who may choose to wear a face covering for the majority of their time in contact with others due to their own needs. BATOD recommends that face coverings with clear panels, which also allow as much of the face to be visible as possible, are used.

It is important to note that face coverings are not classified as [PPE](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe) (personal protective equipment). Where PPE is essential, for example in a clinical setting, QToDs and other staff may be required to wear surgical masks which do not have a clear panel. CE approved clear panel masks are pending. The NDCS has some useful resources including an [infographic](https://www.batod.org.uk/ndcs-infographic-video-on-face-coverings-tips-for-the-general-public/) to provide useful tips to support communication in situations like this.

BATOD’s position is clear. There is an essential need for the role of the QToD in providing specialist advice and support in education settings. QToDs are ideally placed to provide this guidance due to their specialist training, expertise and skills. Members are encouraged to be actively involved in all discussions and risk assessments for the education of DCYP. QToDs are essential in raising awareness of the need for clear face coverings and to highlight the challenges for DCYP in having access whenever any type of face covering is used. In addition, QToDs provide advice on the use of assistive listening technology, raise deaf awareness, share strategies to meet the needs of individual DCYP in their particular setting and provide educational and emotional support.

BATOD welcomes members sharing case studies including examples of where things are working well and also where challenges exist.

Wishing you a safe and productive academic year.

BATOD Steering Group

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**References**

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Schiller, I. S., Morsomme, D., Kob, M., & Remacle, A. (2020). Noise and a Speaker's Impaired Voice Quality Disrupt Spoken Language Processing in School-Aged Children: Evidence From Performance and Response Time Measures. *J Speech Lang Hear Res*, *63*(7), 2115-2131. <https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_JSLHR-19-00348>