

Our approach regarding face coverings for senior pupils has been guided by key sources of information and evidence, including the following:

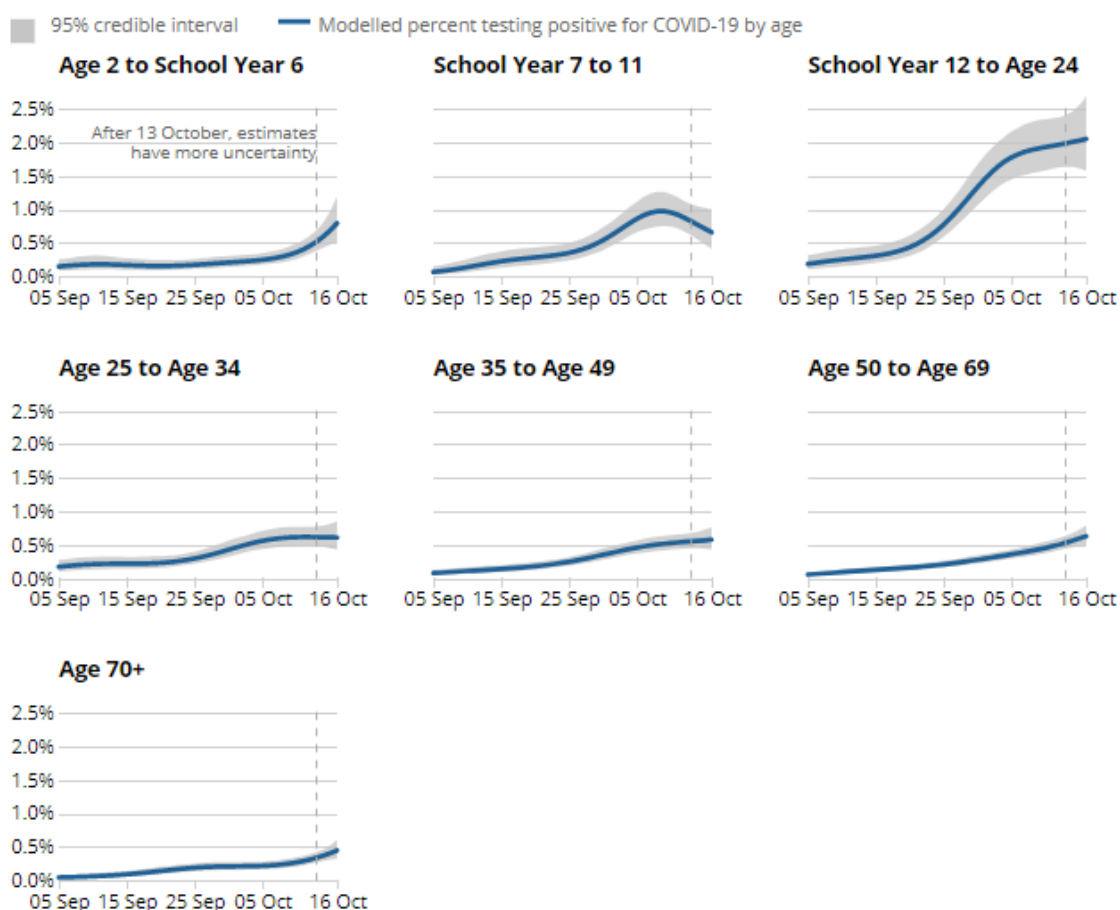
Children and transmission of COVID-19

Recent results for the [ONS Infection Survey for England](#) found that there has been growth in COVID-19 infection rates in all age groups with the current rates highest in older teenagers and young adults. For the first time, the survey separated age categories by school age to show:

- age two years to school Year 6 - includes those children in primary school and below.
- school Year 7 to school Year 11 - includes those children in secondary school.
- school Year 12 to age 24 years - includes those young adults who may be in further or higher education.

This indicates that there may be increasing evidence of transmission amongst older teenagers and young people. However, ONS note that “extreme caution should be taken in over-interpreting small movements in the narrower age groups, particularly those in school Years 7 to 11, which have wider credible intervals.

Estimated percentage of the population testing positive for the coronavirus (COVID-19) on nose and throat swabs, daily, by age group since 5 September 2020, England



The [World Health Organisation](#) advises that (i) children aged 5 years and under should not be required to wear masks; (ii) use of masks by children aged 6-11 is dependent on a number of factors; and (iii) children aged 12 and over should wear a mask under the same

conditions as adults, in particular when they cannot guarantee at least a one metre distance from others and there is widespread transmission in the area.

Transmission in schools in Scotland

Data from sero-epidemiology studies and transmission studies suggest that older children (e.g. teenagers) may play a more active role in transmission than younger children. In Scotland, testing greatly increased following the return to school with a 60 fold increase in testing between mid-April and the end of August. On the week to the 18th of October, 9% of the total of new cases were within the 2-17 age group, overall this group accounts for 17% of the Scottish population. From the beginning of March to the end of the week to the 18th October, a total of 2,566 children aged 2-17 years tested positive for COVID-19, the breakdown of cases by week and age group is shown in figure one below.

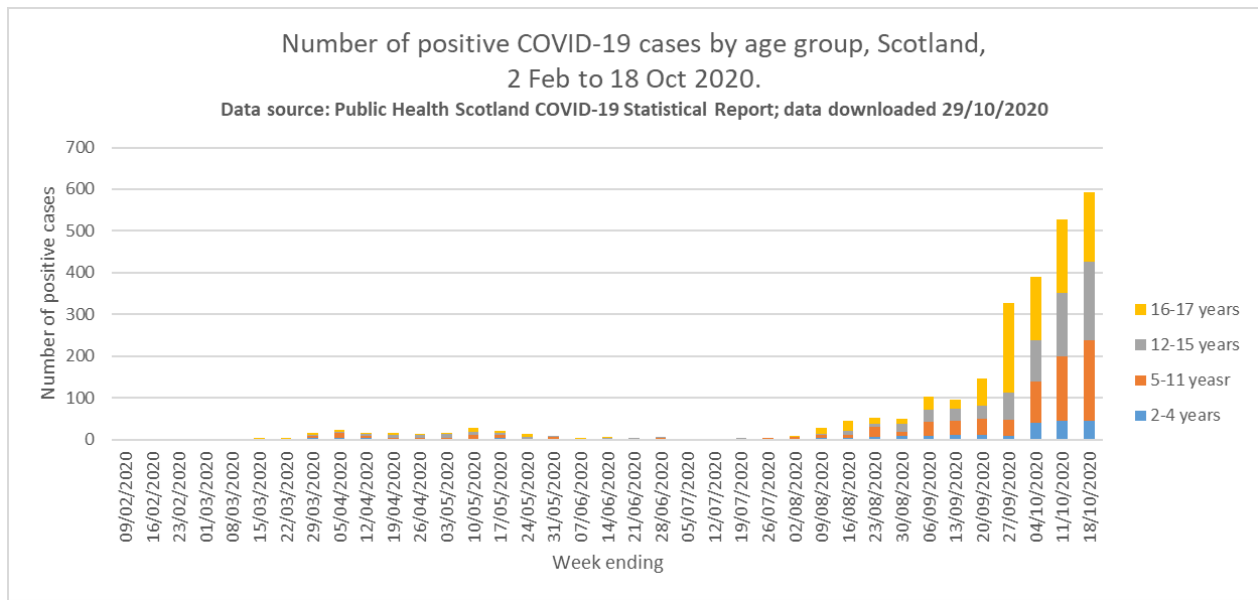


Figure One: Number of positive COVID-19 cases across NHS Scotland over time by Age Group

The chart below clearly shows the difference in the number of cases by age group and that the 18-19 year old group has the highest number of cases among the adolescent age group. This may in part be due to the number of contacts this group has, and the social settings in which they are interacting.

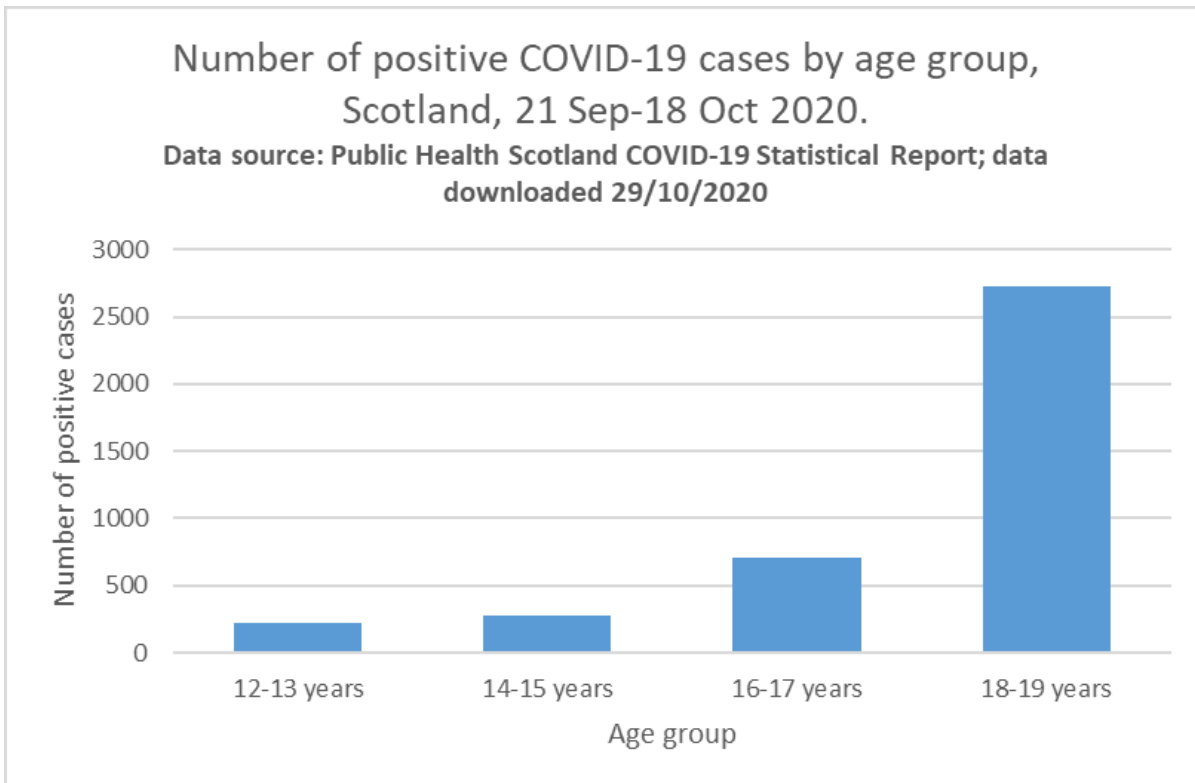


Figure two: Number of positive COVID-19 cases by Age Group for week 39-42

There has been a recent upsurge in the number of cases per 100,000 in all age groups, although again the highest levels are seen within the 12-17 year olds. In the week to 18 October, there are 141.3 cases per 100,000 for the general population.

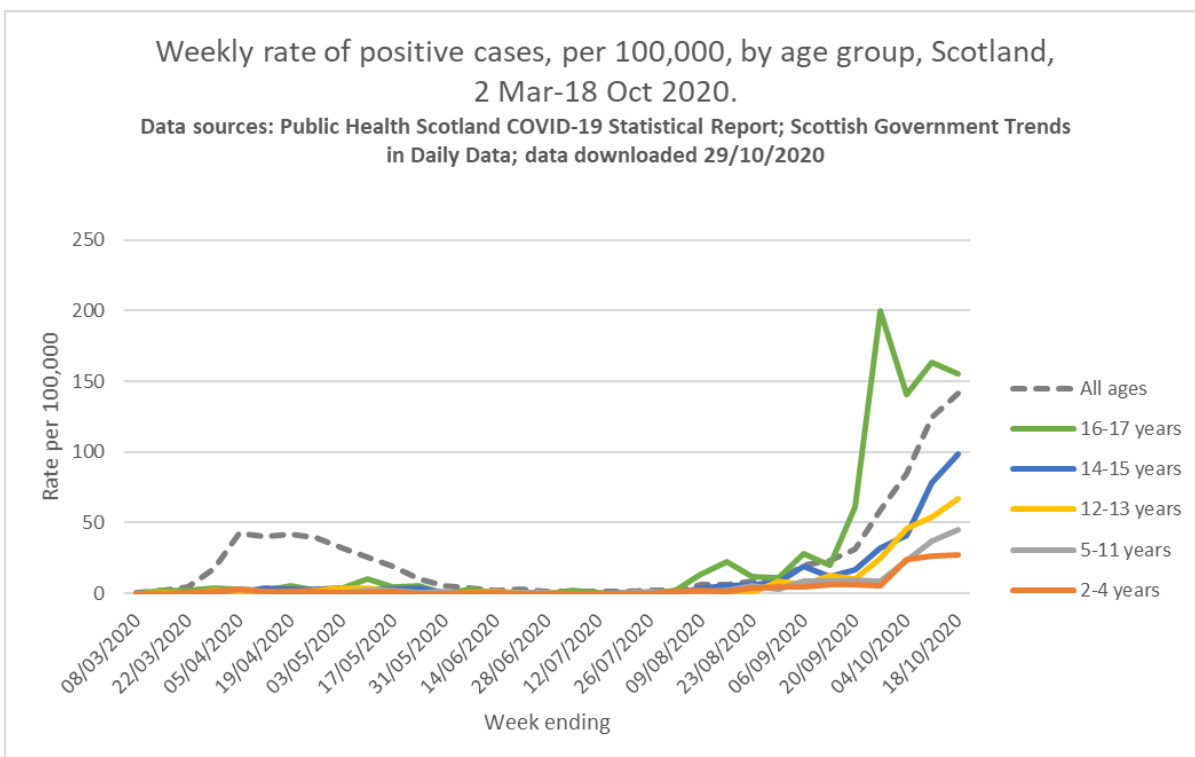


Figure Three: Rate per 100,000 population of positive cases by Age Group

Among 2-17 year olds, the largest number of cases continues to be in the 12-17 year age group, and within this the 16-17 year age group. In week 42, there was an increase in the proportion of children tested who were positive, with all age groups seeing an increase.

The data on NHS24 activity and testing suggests that the occurrence of symptoms for which advice and testing is being sought continues to fall from a peak in week 34 to below levels of contact in 2019. Please see: Public Health Scotland Wider Impacts Dashboard: <https://scotland.shinyapps.io/phs-covid-wider-impact/>; and Public Health Scotland COVID-19 Statistical Report: <https://beta.isdscotland.org/find-publications-and-data/population-health/covid-19/covid-19-statistical-report/>.

2) What data does the Scottish Government have as evidence that parents wearing face coverings outside reduces infection transmission?

The [COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group](#) has emphasised the importance of adult compliance in and out of school to ensure schools remain safe environments.

Following the evidence and experience of school re-opening between August and October 2020, and recent scientific evidence, the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group concluded that its previous advice on face coverings in schools and ELC settings should be strengthened and augmented to manage the main area of risk within schools, which is adult to adult transmission.

The COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group's advice was that face coverings should be strongly encouraged for parents and other visitors to the school site (whether entering the building or otherwise), including parents at drop-off and pick-up. This advice has been reflected in our [guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools](#).

3) What criteria did the Scottish Government use to decide on face coverings in classrooms and parents outside?

The guidance on reducing risks of COVID-19 in schools, including the use of face coverings in classrooms and by parents at the school site, was agreed following significant discussions with stakeholders, and drew on scientific and public health advice. The rationale for the approach agreed with stakeholders, which was precautionary, included the following:

- The evidence we have regarding higher levels of infection amongst 16-17 year olds, which is being monitored via the [COVID-19 Education Recovery Group](#) (CERG).
- Previous advice from the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues, which included advice that, should the prevalence of the virus in the population start rising nationally or in parts of Scotland, consideration be given to encouraging the wearing of face coverings, especially among adults and older pupils in secondary schools, as part of an enhanced system of approaches to reduce transmission. In addition, the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group also advised that face coverings should be strongly encouraged for parents and other visitors to the school site (whether entering the building or otherwise), including parents at drop-off and pick-up.
- The evidence around the efficacy of face coverings as a mitigating measure in respect of infection and transmission, which was taken into account in the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group's advice.
- The potential challenges with maintaining ventilation during winter (although note that updated guidance has been provided on this issue).
- The challenges that some secondary schools report with regard to maintaining distancing between students (which is required by guidance where possible).
- The need to ensure confidence amongst staff, pupils and school communities as prevalence rises in local areas.
- The potential for the wearing of face coverings in classrooms to have a positive influence on wider compliance, e.g. in communal areas and beyond.

We also weighed carefully the potential impacts on learning and teaching. The views of education stakeholders in the CERG and elsewhere helped inform our consideration of this. The nuanced approach set out in the main body of the guidance, which stresses the need for sensitivity to those who are exempt and young people with additional support needs, is intended to apply to use of face coverings in senior phase classrooms as it does in other areas of the school.

4) What risk assessment has been carried out regarding masks and the possible harms, to children at school?

We have undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment in relation to [Scotland's Strategic Framework](#). It can be accessed [here](#).

In addition, we will soon be publishing the Equality Impact Assessment and Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment in relation to the guidance on Reducing the Risks in Schools. If helpful, I would be happy to send copies to you once they are published.

In addition, the guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools makes clear that:

- every setting should undertake and update regularly its own specific risk assessment, considering the domestic arrangements of pupils and pupil wellbeing. Risk assessments should also include underlying health conditions.
- appropriate mitigation measures which should be adopted in situations where opaque face coverings may act as a barrier to communication. Consideration should be given to the use of transparent face coverings or appropriate alternative mitigations adopted which will properly safeguard both pupils and staff.
- where local decisions on the strengthened use of face coverings are made, it will remain vitally important to consider the potential impact on children and young people, including via the appropriate use of Equality Impact Assessments.
- The impact of wearing a face covering for very young learners and/or learners with additional support needs, including any level of hearing loss, should be carefully considered. Communication for many of these learners (including hearing impaired young people) relies in part on being able to see someone's face clearly. This is also important for children and young people who are acquiring English and who rely on visual cues to enable them to be included in learning. Individuals who may not be able to handle and wear face coverings as directed (e.g. young learners, or those with additional support needs or disabilities) should not wear them as it may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission. Scottish Government guidance on "Helping Others" sets out supportive approaches when interacting with hearing impaired people. The National Deaf Children's Society has also suggested some ways in which communication with hearing impaired learners can be supported, in circumstances where face coverings are a barrier to communication.
- In classes where any such impacts are anticipated and no alternative mitigations are reasonable, schools should consider the use of transparent / see-through face coverings which are increasingly available. Some children and young people may need additional support/reassurance about the reasons for adults wearing face coverings. However, as face coverings become more prevalent in wider society, this may be less of a concern.
- No-one should be excluded from education solely on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering. As is usual, if there are any concerns about a child or young person behaving or acting in a way which does not align with school policy or procedure, their behaviour or actions should be discussed with them to resolve those concerns as quickly as possible, with any further action taken in line with usual school policy or procedure. "Included, engaged and involved part 2: preventing and managing school exclusions", provides national policy guidance on the use of early intervention and prevention to promote positive relationships and behaviour.

5) What data is being gathered to measure the effectiveness of masking pupils at school and under which future criteria will the use of them not be required?

We are continuing to develop and implement plans for monitoring the impacts of the policy. These form part of wider arrangements for ensuring an understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 and risk mitigation measures in schools and on children and young people. We are developing these arrangements in a proportionate and adaptable way given the fast changing nature of the situation with the virus.

Our approach, which will be built upon to cover issues around face coverings, includes the following key sources of information and evidence:

- Public Health Scotland currently collect and publish testing and case data for children and young people. Their weekly statistical report, which includes a link to an interactive dashboard, is available [here](#).
- The Scottish Government collects and publishes attendance and absence data, available [here](#).
- An infographic providing a weekly snapshot of current COVID-related data in relation to children and young people, such as the number of tests and positive cases reported, and the attendance and absence of both children and staff in childcare and school settings, is available [here](#). This information is reviewed on a weekly basis by the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG).

We are regularly reviewing the existing and emerging evidence base on face coverings and other restrictions for young people. We are commissioning or supporting a number of surveys or focus groups which will add to the existing evidence base, including the following:

- We are currently in the process of commissioning an omnibus survey of secondary school pupils running in January 2021 which will include questions on awareness of face coverings requirements, attitudes towards requirements and wellbeing impacts of face-covering requirements;
- Regular polling on COVID-19 includes questions on parents' awareness of guidance for children and young people, as well as attitudes to restrictions and requirements.
- We are supporting the Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot to deliver the Lockdown Lowdown 2 survey, which includes a question on awareness of rules and restrictions for young people. The Lockdown Lowdown 2 project also includes a number of focus groups with vulnerable groups that will explore views on face coverings among other issues.
- We are working with Public Health Scotland on a second wave of COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey which will include questions around face coverings and children under 7.

We are also currently working with Young Scot to establish a national 'learner - education recovery panel' of 15 children and young people, ages 9 to 18. Young Scot will support the panel to meet on a monthly basis, feeding directly into the CERG, which provides input into school reopening guidance.

The CERG considers stakeholder feedback, including from public health and educational experts, on the impact and effectiveness of risk mitigation measures in schools on a weekly basis. This supports our qualitative understanding of the experiences of children and young people and parents. We have worked with the Scottish Youth Parliament to identify and support a young person to join the CERG and Liam Fowley, the current Scottish Youth Parliament vice-chair, sits on the group to gather, represent and directly feedback the voices and views of children and young people.

As this evidence is collated and assessed over time, our expectation is that it will provide a useful basis on which to adjust or amend policy and guidance as appropriate.

As noted above, many of these sources are already published either by Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland or partner organisations. As we develop our understanding of the impact and effectiveness of the mitigations in place for children and young people, including in respect of face coverings, we will consider how best to make that evidence available more widely.

It is also worth noting that face coverings for senior pupils in classrooms are currently only required in protection levels 3 and 4. As with all our guidance, we will keep this under close and constant review and update it if necessary in light of experience.