

Update on the use of face coverings from SAIF

7 August 2020 - **Highlighted text for celebrants in red.**

England

We reported last weekend that the Government was extending mandatory wearing of face coverings to include mourners/clients at funeral homes and at places of worship from Saturday 8th August. In a further development, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has today updated the Health Protection Regulations 2020 to include crematoria and burial ground chapels as venues where face coverings should also be worn.

Indeed, many SAIF members will this week have received communications from their local crematoria operators advising that face coverings should be worn during funeral services from the 8th August. This follows a meeting between the Deceased Management Advisory Group (DMAG) and Public Health England (PHE) on Monday (3rd August) in which PHE stated that all funeral service venues would be affected by the changes. This move did cause concern for SAIF and we have sought clarification about a possible exemption for mourners to be able to remove a face mask if they are experiencing distress due to grief.

Please note that it is not a requirement for funeral directing staff to wear face coverings, even in the presence of clients. Funeral staff may wish to ask their clients if they prefer them to wear face coverings, and business owners may want to work with staff to devise a commonsense approach with which employees and clients are comfortable. Many people are likely to have good reasons for wishing to wear a face covering when in close contact with members of the public.

Full information from the UK Government on the rules on face coverings affecting England can be found [here](#).

There are some exemptions for mourners at funeral homes and funeral services who may wish to remove their face covering due to experiencing the distress of grief. Current exemptions, which SAIF believes may provide sufficient reason to remove a face covering before, during and after a funeral service, are:

- young children under the age of 11 (PHE does not recommend face coverings for children under the age of three for health and safety reasons)
- not being able to put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability
- **if putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause you severe distress**
- if you are travelling with or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading to communicate

There are also scenarios when you are permitted to remove a face covering when asked:

- **if speaking with people who rely on lip reading, facial expressions and clear sound.** Some may ask you, either verbally or in writing, to remove a covering to help with communication

SAIF is liaising with relevant crematoria authorities within DMAG to urge a commonsense approach amongst crematoria operators with respect to scenarios in which mourners feel the need to remove a face covering at a funeral service. Indeed, we are pleased to note that the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management has [urged its members](#) to take an "understanding and sympathetic" approach to the needs of mourners, who "should not be asked to leave a service" for removing a face covering during moments of upset.

Furthermore, at a Cabinet Office meeting yesterday (Thursday, 6th August) SAIF asked whether funeral staff will have to wear a face covering during a funeral service at a crematorium. The [Regulations](#) show that anyone "providing services in the relevant place under arrangements made with the person responsible for a relevant place" can be exempted from wearing a face covering. We interpret this to mean that funeral directors may agree with crematoria operators not to wear face coverings in service chapels and other indoor areas.

In terms of public speakers at crematoria or cemetery chapel funeral services, the indication given by PHE was that the celebrant, or clergy or mourner (giving the eulogy or reading) did not need to have a face covering on whilst leading but must ensure they are two metres plus from the congregation/attendees.

Finally, we understand from PHE that funeral directors and crematoria managers are expected to advise mourners of the impending regulatory changes, that is, face coverings are mandatory (bar the exemptions). However, it is not the funeral director's responsibility to enforce these regulations.

Northern Ireland

Face coverings are required on public transport in Northern Ireland and from Monday 10th August it will be mandatory to wear a face covering in a shop or shopping centre, or any indoor public space where it is not possible to maintain social distancing. Further details can be found [here](#) and SAIF is seeking clarification about this development in relation to funerals.

Wales

Wales currently only mandates face coverings on public transport.

Scotland

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon today confirmed that face coverings would now be required at places of worship and other venues. At the time of writing, full details were still to be added to the Scottish Government's [website](#), which we encourage SAIF members to visit in the coming hours to stay up-to-date on the new measures.