



COVID-19 mythbusting series

How and when to wear a face covering (part three)

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Slide 1

In this third video in our mythbusting series on face coverings, we will discuss when wearing a face covering is considered of benefit, and under current circumstances legally mandated to do so, and how to wear a face covering to ensure you protect others to the best of your ability. In this area evidence is rapidly developing, with government advice frequently responding to such advances. To gain access to most recent advice, please visit the UK government's guidance page via the link displayed at the bottom of this slide. Most of the information in this video is informed via information provided in this government guidance page.

Slide 2

As many of you will be aware, there are some variations between constituent countries of the UK, and indeed particular regions, in what is currently legally required of members of the public in many aspects of our lives, including the legal requirement to wear face coverings. It should be stressed again that these are under constant review, so while it is not our aim to keep on top of all of these developments, for veterinary practices (and associated animal keeping establishments such as zoos) we recommend visiting a dedicated page on the RCVS website, which can be accessed by following the first weblink on this slide.

However, as of the beginning of October 2020, whilst variations in scope are noted between countries (for example England specifically lists veterinary practices as requiring face coverings upon entry, whereas veterinary practices can be surmised as being included within 'enclosed spaced open to the public' within other countries), at this time the take home message is that face coverings are mandated within veterinary practices across the UK.

It should also be noted that for employees of veterinary practices, the requirement to self-isolate once a person has been in contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case does vary depending on what personal protective equipment (PPE) was being worn at point of contact. Currently, in England if a person was wearing gloves, an apron, a fluid repellent face mask and eye protection at point of contact, they would NOT be required to self-isolate for 14 days following contact. However, if the employee was wearing a face covering alone at point of contact they would be required to self-isolate. It is recognised that self-isolation requirements could have a rapid impact on the ability of a veterinary practice to provide an adequate service following contact with a case, and as such veterinary practices might want to consider providing enhanced routine PPE to staff if available. As

with other regulations, these do vary by country, and the RCVS have set up a page addressing this specific issue which can be accessed via the second weblink on this slide.

Slide 3

There are a number of exemptions to the requirement to wear face coverings in such settings. For England, these include children under the age of 11, those with physical or mental illness, impairment or disability where wearing a face covering might exacerbate such conditions, wear putting on, wearing or removing a face covering might cause severe distress, when communicating with those who rely on lip reading or facial expressions, to avoid harm or injury to yourself or others; for example, when exercising or undertaking strenuous activities, and for people whose work might require clearer communication at time of particular need, such as police officers. Currently, these exemptions are broadly comparative across the constituent countries of the UK, though we would encourage regular review of country-specific guidelines.

For those that are exempt from wearing a face covering, they may choose to wear a badge indicating their exemption to others if they wish. A couple of examples of such badges are shown on the right of this slide.

There are some circumstances where removal of a face covering is permitted, for example for identification purposes in a bank or shop, when eating or drinking, taking medication, or when getting married. Again we would encourage regular review of country-specific guidelines to ensure you are acting within the law.

Slide 4

We discussed different types of face covering, and the pro's and cons of each in the first video of this series. However, as a general reminder of features to look for any face covering should cover your nose and mouth with a comfortable but secure fit. It should be secured to the head through ties or ear loops and be made of a material that is comfortable or breathable. Regardless of whether you select a disposable or reusable face covering, it should consist of at least two layers of material. In fact, the World Health Organisation recommend three layers should be worn. Finally, for reusable face coverings, you should be able to wash and dry the face covering without causing damage to it. As discussed in a previous mythbusting video, the virus that causes COVID-19 is not particularly robust and can be destroyed by common household detergents, washing powder or liquid, and indeed simple soap and water, so there is no need to change your normal clothes washing habits in this regard.

Slide 5

When putting on a face covering, you should wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Once you have put it on, avoid wearing it on your neck or forehead, for example if you have a need to temporarily take it off to eat or drink. Instead, it is better to remove it entirely and replace it once you have finished a particular activity where wearing a face covering would be impractical. While you are wearing the face covering try to avoid touching the face covering, and generally try to avoid

taking it off and putting in back on in quick succession. For example, if you are moving between different shops, it might be better to keep wearing it between shops if they are a short distance apart. Of course if the face covering becomes damp or if you've touched it, it would be best to change to a different face covering.

Slide 6

This brings me to safely removing a face covering. Before removing your face covering you should wash your hands thoroughly, or use a hand sanitizer, before removing using the straps, ties or clips alone – taking care not to touch the main body of the face covering if possible. You should keep a face covering for only your use. After removal, if single-use dispose of it, and if reusable wash it. Finally, you should then wash or hand sanitize your hands again.

Slide 7

Just to finish off, we thought it useful to provide a couple of hints and tips regarding use of disposable medical face coverings specifically. Although many people are getting used to using these, we have observed these especially being mis-used so thought it useful to give you a few hints and tips! A medical face covering should be orientated so the thick metal strip goes over the nose, and the blue layer faces away from the face – blue to sky. To produce a good seal above the nose immediately following putting a face covering on, it is also useful to pinch around the nose. This is particularly useful for glasses wearers who might find their glasses rapidly mist over when first putting on a face covering otherwise!

It has also come to our attention that these face coverings might be having a detrimental impact on the environment, as this gull having becoming entrapped in a covering demonstrates. We would urge all users of disposable face coverings to ensure they correctly dispose of coverings in a bin, and if possible also use a scissors to clip the loops at both ends to reduce risk of the covering becoming entwined in animal's legs.

Slide 8

Thank you for listening to this third and final video in a RCVSK series focusing on face coverings in light of COVID-19. The World Health Organisation has some excellent additional videos on face coverings, as well as their own 'mythbusting' series, which can be accessed via the first link on this page. As we have noted before, we advise regular review of the UK government's COVID-19 guidance page, particularly during these times of rapid review and change. Finally, we also recommend regular review of the RCVS pages on face coverings, PPE, and other matters relating to veterinary practice via the included links. Thank you for listening!

References

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