

Transparent face masks

I hope this letter finds you well. As CEO of the National Deaf Children's Society, I wanted to understand more about the use of transparent face masks in Scottish NHS Boards, following the welcome announcement in December 2021 by Scottish Government that transparent face masks had been approved for use in health and social care settings.

We understand that current guidance for staff in Scottish hospitals is that that staff providing direct care to individuals should wear a face mask at all times, as per the National Infection Prevention and Control Manual (NIPCM) Scottish Winter (21/22) Respiratory Infections in Health and Care Settings Addendum.

You may be aware that for deaf children young people and adults, patients and staff alike, opaque facemasks create a serious communication barrier. The increased use of facemasks during the pandemic, although necessary to reduce the spread of infection, has made lip-reading and understanding visual cues from facial expressions impossible. This has left deaf people (and I include myself here) struggling to communicate. The implications of misunderstanding medical information due to these new barriers could be very serious.

To address these issues, a UK wide working group was set up to work on the development of transparent PPE, which the National Deaf Children's Society has been supporting. The group produced a new technical specification for use across the UK which gives testing, design and performance requirements for single-use transparent face masks which provide comparable protection to that of a Type IIR mask. The technical specification has been published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-specifications-for-personal-protective-equipment-ppe/transparent-face-mask-technical-specification>

We welcomed the Scottish Government announcement in December 2021 that transparent face masks, developed in line with UK transparent face mask specification had been approved for use in health and social care settings. We understand NHS National Services Scotland began distributing the masks to Health Boards in November 2021, and they were to be in use



**We are the National Deaf Children's Society,
the leading charity for deaf children.**

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from early December 2021 onwards, from an initial order for 2.3 million masks placed by NHS National Services Scotland.

We strongly welcome use the of these masks with deaf patients and staff. Their use could be regarded as a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010. We are encouraging all our members to ask the health services they use to adopt their use. The experience of 'Polly', a 17 year old member of the National Deaf Children's Society, shows how clear face masks can make a huge difference.

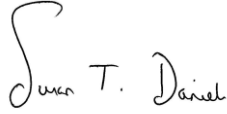
'The use of clear face masks by all hospital staff when communicating with me was invaluable during a recent post-surgery recovery period. I was so tired after my operation that I didn't have the energy to struggling with the communication barrier caused by standard face masks. They didn't fog up and seemed easy to wear... I found my inpatient experience to be the easiest hospital experience from a deaf perspective that I've had in a long time, which is all down to these clear face masks. This is because they enabled me to lipread and communicate with everyone - from surgeons and anaesthetists to physiotherapists and psychologists - easily.'
Polly, 17, on her recent experience at a children's hospital.

We would be keen to learn from NHS boards in Scotland what their experience has been of using the masks, and how policy and practice around their use has developed over the last few months since the Scottish Government announcement. In particular, we would like to know whether you have a policy of routinely using transparent masks with deaf patients and staff, and approximately how many masks of this type you have used since the Scottish government approved them for use in health and social care settings. Could you please pass your response to campaigns@ndcs.org.uk.

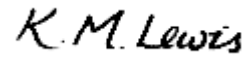
We would also highlight that while the masks NHS National Services distributed were produced by Alpha Solway, two other masks which are also compliant with the UK transparent face mask specification, are now available. While the National Deaf Children's Society and British Academy of Audiology do not endorse any particular mask, we would be keen to know if you have had experience of the use of transparent masks made by any other manufacturer, and we would be happy to supply details of other mask providers if you wish to make your own comparisons.

I'm grateful to Kath Lewis, President of the British Academy of Audiology for her support and co-signing of this letter. We look forward to hearing from you and many thanks in anticipation of your assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan T. Daniels". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Susan Daniels
Chief Executive
National Deaf Children's Society

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K.M. Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kath Lewis
President
British Academy of Audiology