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Covid-19: Face coverings and social distancing rules will continue in all healthcare settings

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Everyone accessing or visiting an NHS hospital or any other healthcare setting must continue to wear a face covering and follow social distancing rules after national covid restrictions end on Monday 19 July, NHS England has said.

Earlier this week, England's health secretary, Sajid Javid, confirmed¹ that the government would go with the removal of all mandatory restrictions including social distancing and mask wearing on 19 July, despite rising infection rates and hospital admissions.

But NHS England said on 15 July that Public Health England's infection prevention control guidelines and NHS visiting guidance would remain in place for all staff and visitors in all healthcare settings.

Chief nursing officer for England Ruth May said continued adherence was vital "so that the most vulnerable people can continue safely to attend hospital, their GP surgery, pharmacy, or any other healthcare settings for advice, care, and treatment." She added, "It's important for the public to continue to play their part when visiting NHS and care settings to help protect our staff and patients, particularly those who may be more vulnerable to infections."

Health minister Jo Churchill said, "Face coverings have played an important role in healthcare settings. They help protect vulnerable patients, staff, and visitors by limiting the spread of this deadly disease and this guidance remains in place."

"We expect patients, visitors, and NHS staff to continue using face coverings and maintain social distancing in all healthcare settings as we cautiously lift restrictions on Monday."

Medical and healthcare leaders welcomed the reminder that the guidance would still apply.

Helen Stokes-Lampard, chair of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, said, "It is right that basic infection prevention and control measures stay in place in healthcare settings. Simple steps such as wearing a face mask and keeping a safe distance away from others are a minor inconvenience but could have a profound positive impact when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable. I strongly support the chief nurse with this clear reminder."

Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said, "This confirmation is exactly what health leaders across the country needed to hear as we head towards the final coronavirus restrictions lifting in England as it will validate their intention to continue following the existing infection control guidelines. It is not too much to ask of those visiting or using NHS services to continue wearing a mask and respecting social distancing measures if it can keep themselves and those around them safe from this horrible disease."

¹ Javid S. House of Commons debates: Covid-19 update. They Work For You. 12 July 2021. www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2021-07-12a.21.0.

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