



4 January 2022

Updated statement on face covering regulations

We welcome the Department of Health's decision to extend the initial grace period of January 7 to allow the Executive's COVID Taskforce to undertake further meetings with stakeholders to consider the logistical details for obtaining proof of exemption, on medical grounds, from the requirement to wear a face covering.

The Commission had written to the Department of Health on 23 December 2021. We reminded it of the importance of adhering to its equality duties. We asked that any process to allow individuals to demonstrate that they are exempt from wearing a face covering be accessible to people with disabilities. We also suggested that the impact of the Christmas break and the closure of many public services be considered in terms of whether the 7 January was an appropriate date to 'enforce' the regulations.

There should be clarity about any exemptions, and we are pleased to see that the Executive will discuss the matter again at its meeting on Thursday and we remain available to provide advice and assistance where needed. The clear public health message is that covering our faces benefits all of us and so, if people can wear a face covering, they should.