



Press release

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Deaf charity urges every NHS Trust in England to use “game-changing” transparent face masks

- **National Deaf Children's Society asks NHS Trusts to remove “serious communication barrier” and invest in transparent face masks.**
- **Nine million deaf people could be “at risk of missing vital information about their health.”**
- **Polly, 17, says “after my operation I didn’t have the energy to be struggling with standard face masks” and called transparent masks “invaluable.”**

The National Deaf Children’s Society has written to every NHS Trust in England urging them to start using transparent face masks.

The letters, sent on 6 June and co-signed by the British Academy of Audiology, warn that deaf patients could face “serious communication barriers” in healthcare, many of which could be overcome by introducing the masks.

There are around nine million people who are deaf or living with a hearing loss in England.

Face masks are likely to remain widespread in the NHS after new guidance, issued on 1 June, said they were still required in a variety of settings, including cancer wards and critical care units.

Staff could also wear them in any other healthcare setting, depending on personal preference and local risk assessments, and whenever a patient may have Covid-19.

The National Deaf Children’s Society says this is a serious issue because whenever opaque face masks are used, lip reading becomes impossible and facial expressions are very difficult to read.

This leaves deaf people struggling to communicate in medical appointments and at risk of serious consequences, such as being unable to understand vital information about their health.

The charity has long campaigned for transparent masks and says they could “transform the healthcare experience for many deaf patients.”

Writing to each Trust’s CEO, it said the masks could be considered “a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act” and confirmed it would be encouraging all its members to ask Trusts to try them.

The charity decided to act after a planned pilot by the Department for Health and Social Care was cancelled, even though three transparent masks are now approved for use as PPE in healthcare settings.

Although they’re not yet on the NHS supply chain, they are available for purchase direct from suppliers. The charity says every NHS Trust should purchase some as soon as possible so they’re available to use when needed.

Deaf young person Polly, 17, has spoken of her recent experience of transparent face masks at a London children’s hospital:

“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 be 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 easily, from surgeons and anaesthetists to physiotherapists and psychologists.”

Susan Daniels OBE, Chief Executive of the National Deaf Children’s Society, said:

“Everyone needs access to crucial information about their health and however they communicate, almost all deaf people rely on lip reading and facial expressions. Opaque face masks make these techniques much more difficult and this could seriously affect communication at a time when they might need it the most.

“Medical appointments can already be very stressful, so no one should have to endure an exhausting struggle just to understand the advice they’re being given.

“Transparent face masks are fully approved and they could transform the healthcare experience for deaf people. Every Trust in the country needs to make the investment now because it really could be game-changing.”

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For more information, please contact the National Deaf Children’s Society media team on 020 7014 1146/1149, rob.white@ndcs.org.uk or 07595 780 411 (outside of office hours).

Notes to editors

- A UK-wide working group was set up by NHS England and NHS Improvement 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 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](#).

The National Deaf Children’s Society

- The National Deaf Children’s Society is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and their families.
- Three babies are born deaf in the UK every day.
- There are more than 50,000 deaf children in the UK. We help them thrive by providing impartial, practical and emotional support, and by challenging governments and society to meet their needs.
- For more information on our work please, visit www.ndcs.org.uk.
- For further support, parents, deaf children and deaf young people can contact us via our Helpline on 0808 800 8880 (voice and text), on InterpreterNow (interpreternow.co.uk/ndcs), by email on helpline@ndcs.org.uk or through online chat at www.ndcs.org.uk/livechat.