

Transport Secretary announces that face coverings to become mandatory on public transport

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The Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has announced that face coverings will become mandatory on public transport from Monday, June 15th.

He has warned that people could be refused travel and even fined if they don't comply with the new regulations.

In his coronavirus update on Thursday, Mr Shapps said: "That doesn't mean surgical masks, which we must keep for clinical settings. It means the kind of face covering you can easily make at home.

"There'll be exceptions to the rule for very young children, disabled people and those with breathing difficulties.

"But broadly, as we come through this phase, we're doing what many other countries have asked transport users to do.

"And as passenger numbers increase, and we expect this trend to continue, we need to ensure every precaution is taken, on buses, trains, aircraft and ferries.

"With more people using transport, the evidence suggests that wearing a face covering offers some –

albeit limited – protection against the spread of the virus.

“A face covering helps protect our fellow passengers. It is something that we can each do to help each other.

“And whilst it also remains true that measures like maintaining social distance and washing your hands remain most critical, we also know that, on public transport, keeping two-metres apart is not always possible, all of the time.

“Indeed, the guidance explicitly recognises this fact.

“So, when more people return to the network, from the 15th June onwards, they will be required to wear a face covering on our transport network.

“We’ll make these rules changes under the National Rail Conditions of Travel and the Public Service Vehicle Regulations for buses.

“This will mean you can be refused travel if you don’t comply and could be fined.

“Alongside transport operators, this will be enforced by the British Transport Police, as necessary.

“But I expect the vast majority of people won’t need to be forced into this, because wearing a face-covering helps to protect others, and most people simply want to help defeat this disease.

“Of course, frontline staff – those in contact with passengers, doing such an important job at this crucial time – will also need to wear face coverings.

“In the coming days, the government will work with unions, who have been supportive for which I am grateful, transport operators and police to ensure they have the supplies they need to be safe and provide reassurance to the public.

“These measures apply in England, and we are working with the devolved administrations ahead of implementation.”

Paul Plummer, Chief Executive of the Rail Delivery Group, said: “Wearing face coverings on trains will help to ensure that those who need to travel by rail can do so with confidence.

“Greater use of face coverings will boost the other measures we are putting in place to keep people safe, like more thorough cleaning, improved information on potential crowding and one-way systems at busier stations.”

ASLEF, the train drivers’ trade union, has welcomed the announcement. Mick Whelan, the union’s general secretary, said: “This is a sensible step by the Secretary of State for Transport.

“We have been working closely with the government to ensure that agreed increases in services on

Britain's train, and Tube, network is done in a safe and controlled manner – to help spread the loading, and maintain social distancing – for the safety of passengers and staff.

“The instruction to wear face coverings to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus will ease the concerns of people travelling, and working, on the transport network.”

Meanwhile British Transport Police says it has no powers regarding the National Rail Conditions of Travel, which is a contract between the train operators and the passenger travelling. If a passenger does not comply with the conditions set, the train company can refuse entry onto the service.

If officers encounter passengers not wearing a face covering on the network, they say they will engage with passengers and encourage them to comply with the National Rail Conditions of Travel.

Assistant Chief Constable Sean O'Callaghan said: “I'm confident that the public will act responsibly and comply with the requirement to wear face coverings on the rail network as we all try to control the spread of the virus.

“I reiterate that everyone should avoid public transport if at all possible. For those who do need to travel, our officers will continue to patrol the rail network and help keep passengers and rail staff safe. Our policing approach will remain the same – engaging with the public and encouraging them to follow the rules of the railway.”

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