

## Written evidence submitted by the National Deaf Children's Society

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This written evidence submission concerns the mandatory use of face coverings on public transport in England and the impact of this on communication for deaf people.

### 2. About us

- 2.1. We are the National Deaf Children's Society, the leading charity for deaf children. We give expert support on childhood deafness, raise awareness and campaign for deaf children's rights, so they have the same opportunities as everyone else. There are over 50,000 deaf children in the UK. We're here for every deaf child who needs us – no matter what their level or type of deafness or how they communicate. We support deaf children, young people, and their families. We work with decision-makers and professionals to overcome the barriers that hold deaf children back.

### 3. Summary of key issues

- 3.1. While we completely understand the public health considerations underpinning the mandatory use of face coverings on public transport in England, it is also imperative that the Government considers the impact that this is having on communication for deaf people.
- 3.2. Communication for virtually all deaf people, including those who use sign language, relies in part on being able to see someone's face clearly – whether this is for lip-reading, understanding facial expressions or for understanding non-verbal communication more widely (e.g. seeing whether someone is smiling or looks upset). An obstruction to the mouth makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a deaf person to understand what is being said. Face masks also have the effect of obscuring and muffling speech, making it harder for deaf people to make use of any residual hearing that they have.
- 3.3. We are particularly concerned about the impact on public transport because misunderstandings and potentially dangerous situations can arise if deaf passengers cannot communicate with transport staff or other passengers. There is also a risk that deaf young people may feel less confident in travelling independently if they feel it will be difficult to understand others.
- 3.4. We are aware of the exemptions to the rule that apply to certain people, however the fact remains that the vast majority of people will be wearing face coverings. This will therefore impact on communication for deaf people. We feel that public awareness of this issue needs to be raised further and we would like to see the Department for Transport take further action in this area.
- 3.5. We contacted public transport companies in England to raise awareness of this issue and to promote our deaf awareness resources. We've received a really positive

response from this communication and we think there is a real desire in the industry to do more on this issue. For instance, various operators have asked us where they can purchase clear face masks.

#### **4. Recommendations**

- 4.1. The Department for Transport should more widely promote deaf awareness resources, tips and information to transport staff and passengers. You can see our short 'top tips' video here for an example of the sorts of resources that we mean - <https://www.facebook.com/112180125505122/videos/3087775494640238>
- 4.2. The Department for Transport should work with other Government departments to look into commissioning clear face masks, which would benefit staff and passengers and aid communication. You can see our letter to NHS England, co-written with other national deaf charities here - <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/5763/letter-to-nhs-england-about-face-masks-150520.pdf>

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