



Merton Centre for Independent Living
Unit 1 Batsworth Road
Mitcham
CR4 3BX

Wednesday 5th August 2020

Dear Supermarkets & Stores based in and around the London Borough of Merton,

It is now compulsory in the United Kingdom for face coverings to be worn in all stores. We understand the importance of this measure being implemented and followed to control the virus. However, we are writing to reiterate that not all Deaf and Disabled people are able to wear face coverings and it is important that your organisation is understanding of this. We would also like to express our concern about how the mandatory wearing of face coverings may affect local Deaf and Disabled people.

The government has shared information relating circumstances, for health, age or equality reasons, where people are not expected to wear face coverings. You can read more here - <https://bit.ly/33FpfQT>

Disability Rights UK conducted research that found 40% of Disabled people asked could not wear a face mask due to breathing impairments, mental health issues and other conditions. 13% also said that they needed to lip read.

We appreciate that you are following government guidance by implementing the mandatory wearing of face coverings in your store. However, many of us on the board at Merton CIL feel that throughout the pandemic our rights as Deaf and Disabled people have been forgotten. This is a feeling that is shared by many Deaf and Disabled people.

Therefore, we are keen to work with stores in and around Merton to ensure that they remain accessible and inclusive spaces for Deaf and Disabled people. We would also like stores to consider measures to ensure that Deaf and Disabled people are not confronted by staff or customers as Disability Rights UK found that 60% of Disabled people fear being challenged for not wearing a mask, with the same amount not feeling they had the confidence to stand up for themselves if challenged.

We have set out a few recommendations below to allow Deaf and Disabled people to shop independently:

1. Ensure that all staff and security guards are aware of and understand the government guidance around reasons why Deaf and Disabled people or people with impairments may not be able to wear a face covering.
2. Train staff and security guards on disability issues and awareness to ensure that this information can be passed on to customers.
3. Speak to Deaf and Disabled people about your procedures and changes throughout the pandemic so that you do not create barriers.
4. Clear signage at the entrance of your store informing that you understand that Disabled people or people with impairments may not be able to wear a face covering.
5. Put procedures in place for Deaf and Disabled people who cannot wear face coverings to feel confident to shop without the fear of confrontation. You could look into having sunflower lanyards in store for those with hidden disabilities, exemption cards and more.

We are run and controlled by Deaf and Disabled people with lived experience. We are happy for you to contact us to further discuss any of the recommendations above. We are also happy for you to contact us to get feedback from local Deaf and Disabled people on any changes or procedures that you plan to implement throughout the pandemic. We would also like for you to inform us of your organisation's stance of this issue and we will share your feedback with Deaf and Disabled people in Merton.

Thank you for taking the time out to review this letter.

Kind regards,



Gina Vettese
Vice Chair of Merton Centre for Independent Living

