

New Masking Laws Risk Clinically Vulnerable People As Mask Discrimination Increases

Clinically Vulnerable Families is raising urgent concerns over the UK Home Office's recent proposal to target mask wearers during protests. This proposed legislation could see individuals facing fines of up to £1,000 and potential imprisonment for choosing to cover their faces during protests. Such measures disproportionately impact on the clinically vulnerable, for whom wearing a mask is not so much a choice but a necessary health protection.

A recent poll conducted by Clinically Vulnerable Families, core participants in the UK Covid-19 Inquiry representing clinically vulnerable people, has unveiled a concerning trend: 64% of individuals wearing masks in the UK have faced discrimination due to their mask use, a significant rise from the 46% reporting such experiences since September 2022. This data exposes the challenges already faced by those who need to wear masks in public. Whilst the right to wear religious clothing is protected by law, similar protections are noticeably absent for clinically vulnerable people who are reliant on masks for their safety.

The impact of such laws on the clinically vulnerable community has already impacted on their fundamental right to vote disenfranchising voters. Andrea Barrett is one example of a clinically vulnerable voter who, at the local elections in May 2023, was unable to vote at all because she couldn't do so safely when she was asked to remove her mask at a polling station under the new voter ID laws.

Lara Wong, founder of Clinically Vulnerable Families, stated, "New regulations not only jeopardise our safety but also risk silencing the clinically vulnerable community. At a time when our democracy should be striving for greater accessibility and inclusiveness, such measures mark a significant step backwards."

Clinically Vulnerable Families is urgently calling on the government to reconsider these proposals to ensure that the rights and well-being of the clinically vulnerable are not undermined. They advocate for the protection of everyone's right to protest and vote safely, which includes recognising the necessity of masks for many within our communities. Legislation is needed to acknowledge the health-based need for masks and ensures that the use of personal protective equipment by vulnerable people is protected under the law.

