

COVID-19: Wales TUC and BMA Cymru Joint Statement on PPE in Health and Social Care



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Wales TUC and BMA Cymru have issued the following joint statement on the need for greater clarity on the stock and supply of personal protective equipment, assurances that all health and social care staff will get the PPE they need, and for independent inspectorates to ensure that supplies are getting where they need to go.

Shavanah Taj, Wales TUC's General Secretary said:

"Frontline NHS workers fighting COVID 19 are deeply scared and anxious about their safety, particularly as the death toll of frontline workers continues to increase.

"We urgently need clarity on PPE stocks and supply."

Dr David Bailey, BMA's Welsh Council Chair said:

"Frontline staff simply cannot be expected to treat patients without appropriate PPE.

"Staff must receive assurances that appropriate PPE will be available, and that a national strategy is in place to ensure supplies will continue.

"We are calling on Welsh Government to be transparent with staff about supplies.

"It's imperative that staff are protected so they can continue to protect patients."

Tanya Palmer, Unison Cymru Regional Secretary said:

“We need to know urgently, what are the stock levels, where are they being stored and when will they be delivered. We need an honest response now”

The joint statement in full reads:

“Our affiliated trades unions in the health and social care sector have been contacted by hundreds of workers with concerns about inadequate levels of PPE to enable them to do their jobs safely.

“This includes cases where no PPE is provided at all, insufficient or unsafe PPE is given, or PPE has been provided to an employer but withheld from staff. It also includes examples of staff not able to access adequate changing facilities, workers forced to buy their own PPE, and where staff have become terrified to go to work for fear of making themselves and their families ill.

“While we have maintained regular dialogue with Welsh Government over PPE provision in health and social care settings, we need far more detailed information to fully understand their plan to ensure that workers’ health and safety is being adequately considered, and provide our members with the reassurance they deserve as they continue to serve the public. This includes:

- The detail of PPE stock held and ordered, including what type of masks and other protective wear has been ordered. This should include worst case scenario modelling.
- A clear strategy for how it is being distributed, including how it will reach social care providers in the private and third sectors. We had been led to believe that all social care settings were to benefit from the state’s PPE provision but from recent media statements it appears that social care providers are expected to rely on their existing suppliers in the first instance. We are very concerned that this will lead to inconsistencies in the provision of PPE in the care sector in particular.
- A training plan – the guidance on when certain types of PPE should be used is complex. We need to be confident that staff are not only provided with adequate PPE, but are trained to identify which situations they need to be using it in, and how frequently it should be changed.
- Fit tests – while we are aware that these tests have been carried out in NHS settings, we would welcome further detail on this and the provision of adequate PPE for workers who do not fit a standard mask in both health and social care settings. Face fitting has to be undertaken by a qualified tester.
- Appropriate changing facilities and broader guidance – unions have been contacted by hospital workers who are unclear about whether they should be wearing their own clothes to work or scrubs, and by domiciliary care workers who

are unsure of how they should be changing and maintaining good hygiene while they work. There needs to be clear and consistent guidance for all health and social care employers so that workers can do all they can to keep their patients, themselves and their families safe.

- Basic provision for all – the guidance states that “[f]or health and social care workers working in reception and communal areas but not involved in direct patient care, every effort should be made to maintain social distancing of 2 metres. Where this is not practical use of FRSM is recommended.” We believe that all workers in health and social care settings should be able to access basic PPE provision in order to comply with the guidance, as the physical infrastructure of these settings hardly ever allows for 2m social distancing to be maintained at all times. Risk and COSSH assessments should be monitored to assess the risk to workers, which should then be subject to consultation with the worker/union rep, and then used to inform what PPE is required, giving priority of issue to those experiencing the greatest exposure to risk.

“We believe that the information requested above should be available publicly so that trade unions can support their members to get the PPE they need to carry out their work safely, and so that workers can feel confident that the necessary measures are in place to ensure that no health or social care setting runs out of PPE.

“We are also calling for the relevant health and social care inspectorates to proactively check that Welsh Government policy on PPE and social distancing is being delivered in health and social care settings. We appreciate why routine inspections have been put on hold, but the way in which PPE is delivered by health boards and local authorities has raised concerns, including around unequal provision and insufficient supplies. We therefore think that the necessary checks should be introduced to provide greater confidence in the system and minimise the risks posed to our workforce.”



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