



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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## **WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

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**TITLE**            **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

**DATE**            **25 March 2020**

**BY**                **Vaughan Gething, Minister for Health and Social Services**

I wish to outline steps I have taken to enhance the arrangements in Wales for protecting our front line health and social care staff who are caring for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients.

We are in a rapidly changing situation as we move from efforts to contain a 'high consequence infection' to the need to delay the community transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic. This development has resulted in the need for new revised guidance on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which has been agreed across all UK nations and which is consistent with guidance from the World Health Organisation. It is important now we all share the same understanding of this guidance and that we procure and provide the PPE that our staff require for their protection.

To support the use of this equipment, Public Health Wales has provided advice on infection prevention and control for healthcare settings and advice on the correct use of personal protective equipment has also been issued to specific groups of healthcare workers.

I must stress the importance of following the guidance in order to protect staff and also to ensure that the appropriate PPE is used for each healthcare setting.

Let me again make clear that this personal protective equipment is for the use of front line health and social care staff, specifically as they deal with confirmed or suspected COVID 19 patients.

Turning now to some specific measures I have authorised:

1. Personal protective equipment from the pandemic stockpile has been released to the NHS and to social care to reinforce the regular NHS supply routes that have come under substantial pressure.

2. Health Boards have continued to be able to draw on supplies through Shared Services. However, as a result of a significant increase in demand for Type 11 R fluid resistant facemasks and FFP3 respirators, I have authorised a significant push of PPE to the 7 Health Boards, Welsh Ambulance Service and Velindre.
3. I know that it isn't normal for GPs to hold large stocks of PPE at their clinics other than for business as usual. That is why I also authorised from the pandemic stockpile a distribution of PPE (facemasks, gloves and aprons) to all 640 GP clinics and the 40 GP out of hours services in Wales.
4. Since that first GP distribution took place, the guidance for GPs has changed and there is now the need for GPs to wear eye protection when dealing with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients. I have, therefore authorised a second distribution of PPE to all GPs clinics, to take place this week.
5. Pharmacies are often the first point of contact for people looking for advice on treatments before going to their GP. It was essential that we took steps to protect these key front line healthcare workers dealing every day with people who may be unwell. I authorised a distribution of PPE for all pharmacies in Wales and all 715 pharmacies will have received this equipment.
6. Social care has an essential role in our response to COVID-19. I have authorised PPE to also be released for use by social care providers. Health Boards have been providing PPE to support care centres dealing with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases. This week we will be enhancing those arrangements by putting in place a contingency plan for social care access to PPE through local authorities' Directors of Social Services and also put in place arrangements to monitor the use of PPE and top up these supplies when needed.

I appreciate that there are and will be continuing issues concerning personal protective equipment and healthcare supplies. I want to make three further points:

1. The re-supply timeframe in respect of some of our PPE is uncertain. We must, therefore, use the stock we have efficiently and appropriately until resupplies become more certain. We have a health countermeasures group in place, including Shared Services that is networking at a UK level to ensure that these essential supplies continue to be accessed.
2. We also do need to ensure that the access to this PPE stock is reserved for the use of our frontline healthcare staff and that those staff have the appropriate infection control guidance to provide the personal protection that provides the fundamental basis for the use of PPE. Where voluntary bodies are helping the NHS or social services in caring for suspected or confirmed COVID-19, those bodies should be able to access the appropriate PPE by making contact with the NHS or local authority organisation they are supporting.

3. Finally, to provide re-assurance and support our healthcare organisations, I have asked that a hotline telephone and email contact is provided to the Welsh Government Emergency Co-ordination Centre. This can be used in an emergency where PPE supplies have been disrupted or there has been an unplanned and unforeseen surge in use. This line should not be needed but will be put in place and operate 7 days a week.