

Before publication of the revised guidance, on 21st January, a clinical and scientific review was carried out and, as the guidance states 'no changes to the recommendations, including PPE, have been made in response to the new variant strains at this stage, however this position will remain under constant review'. This means that, at the present time, if an employer is following the updated guidance for controlling exposure to Covid-19, they will be taking, under health and safety legislation, reasonably practicable precautions to control the risk.

Whilst HSE will not be undertaking a review, as this has already been done by those responsible for the guidance, we will continue working closely with DHSC and other government departments to provide information and advice on workplace and workforce issues to support the UK response, particularly in the provision of technical advice to protect health and care workers, and others, providing care to people who have been diagnosed as having the virus.

Ventilation:

Effective ventilation is important for minimising the risk of transmitting Covid-19. This includes within health and social care premises. To assist employers we recently updated our guidance on the HSE website:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/equipment-and-machinery/air-conditioning-and-ventilation.htm>

This guidance contains advice on measures that can be taken to improve ventilation. The guidance also directs employers to seek further advice on complex ventilation systems from the Chartered Institute of Building Engineers (CIBSE) website, which can be found at the following link:

<https://www.cibse.org/coronavirus-covid-19/emerging-from-lockdown>

HSE Inspections:

In addition to the above points, you also mention the need for employers to be aware of their legal obligations and to carry out sufficiently robust risk assessments. Work on this is well underway and, during December and January we inspected the arrangements of thirteen NHS trusts and four health boards across England, Scotland and Wales for managing risks arising from Covid -19.

Whilst our local Inspectors will ensure that any remedial action is promptly taken by the trust/health boards following those inspections, at a national level we will also be sharing our findings with NHS England and Improvement and the devolved nation equivalents by the end of February, if not sooner. Through them we will be asking other trusts/health boards to review their arrangements, including their risk assessments, in light of the findings, so that learning, both positive and negative, is shared and implemented across the health sector. We will keep this under review to determine if further action is required to ensure adequate COVID -19 secure measures are being taken across the sector to keep health and care workers safe.