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To:

Chief executives of all NHS trusts and foundation trusts
CCG Accountable Officers
GP practices and Primary Care Networks
Providers of community health services

Copy to:

Royal College Presidents
BMA
RCN
NHS Providers
NHS Confederation
Chairs of NHS trusts, foundation trusts and CCG governing bodies
Local authority chief executives and directors of adult social care
Chairs of Local Resilience Forums
Chairs of ICSs and STPs
NHS Regional Directors
NHS 111 providers

Dear colleagues

We are extremely grateful for the huge effort from all NHS colleagues and the work that is underway to change the way that hospitals and GP practices deliver services to free up tens of thousands of beds and bring in more staff. To support this, it is vital there are systems and equipment in place to ensure staff and patients are safe.

The supply and safety of NHS personal protective equipment (PPE) is obviously a priority and we must ensure that colleagues working in any setting in the NHS have full confidence in the PPE they are expected to use. PPE is only one element of safe and effective infection control, and appropriate environmental controls, hand and respiratory hygiene, the management of patients and the information and training for staff are just as important. We hope this letter clarifies the current approach and explains our next steps.

Supply

In the past two weeks the NHS Supply Chain have delivered 170 million FFP3 masks, surgical masks and other PPE equipment to NHS trusts and 58,000 healthcare settings including GPs, pharmacies and community providers. This does not include all the deliveries being made with the support of the armed forces. In fact today and the previous two days deliveries have included 42.8 million gloves, 23

- eye protection if there is a risk of splashing or exposure to respiratory droplets.

Comparison with WHO guidelines

The UK recommends FFP3 respirators when caring for patients in areas where high risk aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) are being performed. These should be fit tested for all staff and not just fit-checked. The WHO recommends FFP2 respirators for AGPs. If for any reason FFP3 masks are not available, we recommend using the FFP2 masks as a safe alternative but please note these should also be fit-tested.

Consistent with the WHO guidelines, full sleeve gowns are recommended for high risk procedures (e.g. during AGPs) or where there is a risk of extensive splashing of blood and/or other body fluids. In all other settings, the UK has a longstanding bare below the elbow policy as part of our long-term strategy to manage healthcare associated infections. COVID-19 is not airborne, it is droplet carried. We know the cross contamination from gowns for infection can be carried by the gown sleeves and the advice therefore is bare below the elbows and you scrub your hands, your wrists and your forearms.

In addition to wearing PPE, clinicians should practice usual infection prevention and control measures, including environmental cleaning and hand hygiene to reduce the risk of onward transmission.

The guidance going forward

We are keeping the guidance under constant review. Over the next few days Public Health England, NHS England and NHS Improvement and the Department of Health and Social Care in conjunction with the Devolved Administrations will work with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges to ensure the guidance is clearer for clinical colleagues working in a variety of NHS settings performing a range of different clinical procedures. We aim to organise the recommendations using a 'place-based' approach so it is easy to understand the appropriate PPE needed for the potential risk. We will publish an update to the guidance within days.

We are grateful for all the feedback about PPE supply and delivery. Please rest assured that all issues are being urgently dealt with.

Yours sincerely

Personal Data

Professor Stephen Powis

National Medical Director

NHS England and NHS Improvement

Personal Data

Yvonne Doyle CB MD

Medical Director and Director of Health Protection, Public Health England

Personal Data

Carrie MacEwen

Chair, Academy of Medical Royal College