

OFFICIAL: SENSITIVE

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5 June 2020

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport

**COVID-19: THE USE OF FACEMASKS IN HOSPITAL SETTINGS**

**Purpose**

1. To advise the Cabinet Secretary that the Secretary of State for Health is likely to announce new guidance on the use of surgical facemasks for all hospital staff where physical distancing is not possible (when in non-clinical areas) in a press briefing **at 5 pm this evening**. Advice is also suggested for immediate steps to be taken in Scotland.

**Priority**

2. **Immediate.**

**Background**

3. The evidence for the extended use of surgical facemasks beyond the immediate care setting in hospitals has been reviewed by the UK Infection Prevention and Control Cell and was also considered by the SAGE Hospital onset COVID-19 Working Group (HOC WG) on 4 June. This is particularly in relation to healthcare workers who are unable to physically distance due to ergonomics and environmental constraints within this setting as well as a lack of situational awareness of the need to physically distance on the part of the healthcare worker. The SAGE group in particular found it is reasonable to consider extending the use of facemasks by healthcare workers, as well as face coverings by the public who are visiting hospitals in relation to the following documented evidence:

- the ongoing potential for asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic COVID-19 in healthcare workers (or members of the public) in hospitals
- ~10-fold increased rate of COVID-19 in healthcare workers compared with members of the public;
- clear evidence for transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in hospitals and healthcare associated cases of COVID-19, including ongoing hospital outbreaks.

4. The view of the COVID-19 Nosocomial Review Group (CNRG), based on current evidence from NHS Scotland cluster analysis on the number of staff positive, support the SAGE view that face coverings/masks should be used by all healthcare staff who are unable to physically distance as well as members of the public who are attending healthcare settings. In addition, an article in the Lancet publication on 1 June supported the policy view.

**Secretary of State for Health Announcement**

5. Officials have learnt today that an announcement will be made at 5 PM this afternoon regarding the use of facemasks, **details of the operational guidance are attached separately**. The key actions within the guidance are as follows:

6. NHS Trusts should now plan to roll out the following recommendations:

*the wearing of surgical face masks by all staff in non-clinical areas of hospital settings would play a role in reducing transmission of COVID-19*

*This could be a Type I or Type II facemask (worn to prevent the spread of infection from the wearer)*

*that visitors to hospital settings should wear some form of face covering for the same reason i.e. to prevent the spread of infection from the wearer.*

## **Risks**

7. There is a risk of taking a policy forward in solely hospital settings for healthcare workers only and not for visitors as well as those in Care Home and Care at Home settings. In reality the issue of environmental constraints and the ability to comply with physical distancing is also apparent in all settings. Whilst the studies and evidence has focussed on hospitals, Officials consider a system-wide approach to be advisable.

8. There are implementation challenges for extending the use of medical/surgical face masks, which need to be addressed. These include the sufficient availability of masks, however we are assured from NSS that there are sufficient stocks at present.

9. Officials have not had the opportunity to discuss the change in policy with relevant Unions, however we consider that, subject to availability, they will be welcoming of an announcement and willing to consider the related guidance as it is developed.

## **Conclusion**

10. Following the decision of the SAGE nosocomial group and the CNRG, Officials consider that a system wide approach to the use of facemasks in hospital, care home and care at home settings is advisable as part of the package of measures to prevent the onwards transmission of COVID-19.

11. As we understand that the policy will be extended to Care Homes in England next week, if the Cabinet Secretary is content, we suggest an announcement is made at the Media briefing on Sunday to confirm the approach to using facemasks in hospital, care home and care at home settings is advisable as part of the package of measures to prevent the onwards transmission of COVID-19.

12. Officials will then ensure that appropriate guidance is developed as a matter of urgency to operationalise the policy.

## **Recommendations**

- **The Cabinet Secretary is invited to consider the attached submission and NHS England guidance document, as attached separately.**
- **Confirm that she is content with the approach detailed above and for a media announcement to be made to confirm the wider use of facemasks as part of a package of measure to prevent the onwards transmission of COVID-19.**

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Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constituent Interest	General Awareness
Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing Minister for Mental Health			x x		

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